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that we can realize our perfection;  
through Art and Art only that we can  
shield ourselves from the sordid perils of  
actual existence.*

**Oscar Wilde**  
1854-1900

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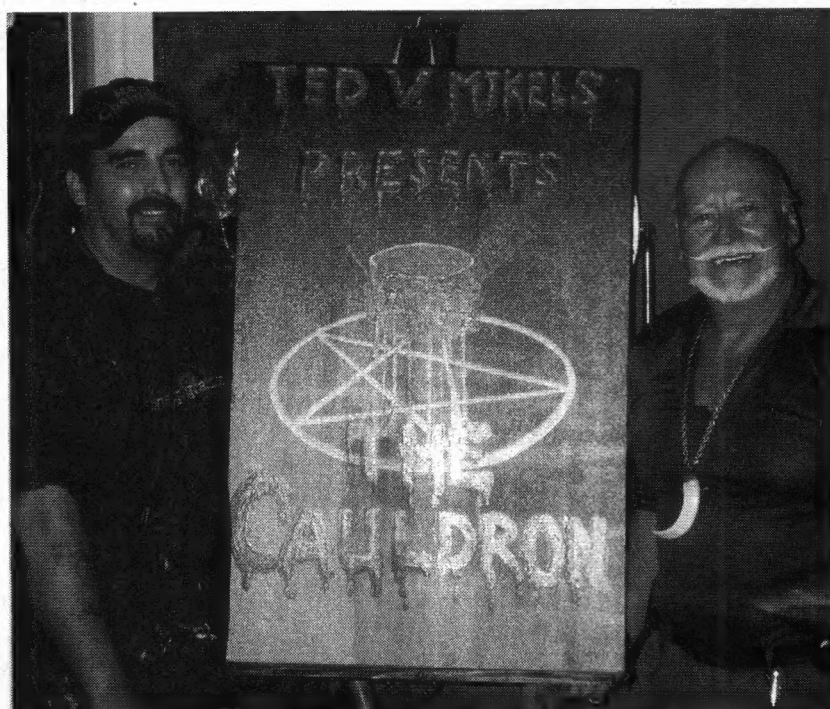
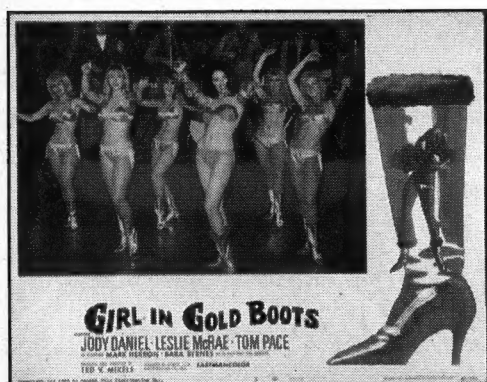
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# THE FABULOUS TED V.

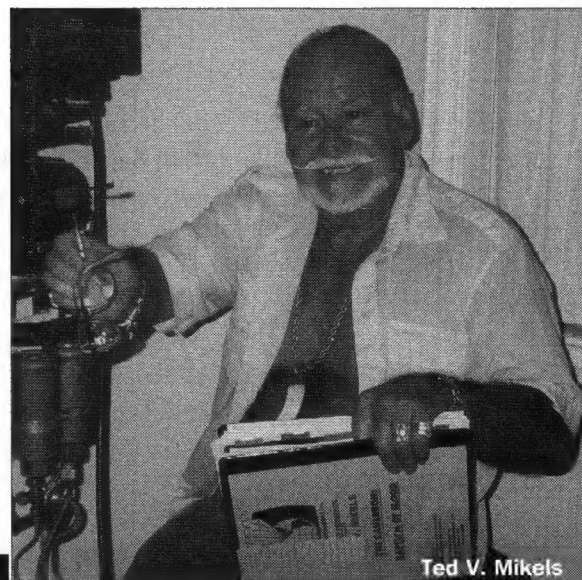
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Lobby cards from *Girl in Gold Boots*, a Ted V. Mikels classic, and above, "Mac" and Ted currently working on his latest movie, *The Cauldron*.



# TEDDY V: MIKELS



## Moviemaking

### Part 2

INTERVIEW WITH  
CHRISTOPHER J. JARMICK

**T**ed V. Mikels has been making movies for 53 years...and he won't stop. As I put the finishing touches on this article, he is near finished with his 22nd, called *THE CAULDRON: BAPTISM IN BLOOD*.

We discussed some of his best known movies in the first part of our interview, which included *Astro-Zombies*, *Corpse Grinders*, *The Doll Squad* (the film that most likely inspired *Charlie's Angels*), and *Girl in Gold Boots* (a G-rated predecessor to *Showgirls*).

This time we'll talk about the last 25 years, including such films as *Ten Violent Women*, *The Worm Eaters*, and *Mark of The Astro-Zombies*, and the people he's worked with, including Tura Satana, Ed Wood Jr., Milton Berle and even Chris Rock.

Ted V. Mikels was born around 75 years ago in St. Paul Missouri (he won't reveal his actual age) and then moved to Oregon where he taught himself how to make movies. He started making his own films as a teenager in Portland and moved to Hollywood at the beginning of the 1960s. At the end of the 60s (until

1985), he lived in a large house in Glendale, California known as *THE CASTLE*—along with ten women who sometimes claimed to be his wives. So was *The Castle* a female film school or Ted's personal harem?

Ted likes to point out his movies have grossed over half a billion dollars. "Others have made fortunes on some of my movies," Ted says. "I've made very little on them. If you want to get rich, don't make movies like I do."

Ted V. Mikels is a one of kind obsessed, fearless, driven, trailblazing, movie-making pioneer. He has started or influenced the careers of thousands who work in the movie industry today. His life in movies has been a long one. Over the last 15 months, I have spent hours corresponding with and interviewing Mikels as he shared details of his life and stories about making his movies

# MANIAC



## TED V. MIKELS: America's Obsessed Movie-making Maniac

with me. He is a warm, optimistic, generous man and I am grateful for the time he shared with me and fascinated with his passion, tireless devotion and determination to continue to make his films.

**Christopher J. Jarmick: You're very proud of your 1977 film about the real life polygamist Alex Joseph.**


TED V. MIKELS: Yes, I am proud of that one. I co-wrote, produced, directed, shot and edited Alex Joseph and His Wives.

**Jarmick: And there was really an Alex Joseph?**

MIKELS: Oh yes. He was a very well known Mormon polygamist in Utah, had 7 or 8 wives and would even go on television and talk about his lifestyle.

**Jarmick: The movie wasn't released in the U.S.**

MIKELS: (sighs) Another year of my life making a movie that not many people have seen. I was only paid some rental fees for my equipment which I used for the movie, but nothing more. The executive producer was Bill Thrush. He was a sub-distributor and theater owner in San Francisco and helped launch my movie: Blood Orgy of the She-Devils. He wanted to make this movie and so that's what we did. He had fights with Alex Joseph and with Paramount and thought different people were trying to take the film away from him. He disappeared for like 3 years after the movie was finished. I got to direct some of the scenes in the Utah desert from horseback, which was challenging and fun. I am still in touch with some of the wives, although Alex passed away not long ago.

 *Alex Joseph and His Wives - never received a release in the United States but has a huge cult of fans of Australia and is a film I've never seen and remains officially unavailable commercially.*

**Jarmick: There was a few years' gap between Doll Squad and your next movies.**

MIKELS: Well I was very busy working on promotion and distributing the films I had made and there were some problems in getting financing and then the Alex Joseph project actually took quite a bit of time.



**Betwitching Malucina (a witch) and Demonica (Coven witch sorceress) on the set of The Cauldron.**

**Jarmick: : One of the craziest films you were ever involved with, has got to be The Worm Eaters, which was released in 1978. Tell me how this one came about.**

MIKELS: The Worm Eaters was a lark. My friend Herb Robbins, who had performed as an actor in a few of my movies, (including Doll Squad), had written this script about Worm Eaters. I told him if we could film people actually eating *live* night crawlers, I would make the movie. Then we would have something new to exploit. I borrowed bucks again, got lab and other deferments, and we made the movie. I was editing Alex Joseph and His Wives at the time, but each day, I would drive out to the set, and assist in finishing the shots of the day. We had



worm eating contests in various cities in the country. One prize-winning worm-eater, actually ate 57 night crawlers, both witnessed and videotaped. We also made big news in Kansas City, at a Show-A-Rama convention for theater owners. We got front page and a photo in the Kansas City main newspaper showing Herb Robins and myself eating worms, getting the kind of publicity, the majors, with all of their money, could not buy. My lab bill with prints and all was over \$80,000, a pretty hefty sum for one guy like me, with my own distribution company, to pay, and that was in addition to production costs. A lot of people have thought I should probably take my name off of the movie, but I didn't write or direct it and figure it's too well known to pretend I wasn't involved with it.

👉 *The Worm Eaters – Herman the hermit (Robbins) is a Dr. Dolittle to worms. When the mayor chases him off his property, Herman gets revenge, planting special worms in people's food. You know the saying you are what you eat? Ever seen the movie Sssss? Gross, dumb, sometimes funny, one of a kind film and on DVD from Image too).*

**Jarmick: The Worm Eaters somehow led to Steve Barkett making his film The Aftermath, aka Zombie Aftermath, with Sid Haig. How did that come about?**

MIKELS: Herb Robins and Steve Barkett had differences while shooting The Worm Eaters, so I told Steve I would give him a project to make for me. I had a story called The

Aftermath, which I had written years earlier. Steve had many ideas of his own, so to make things simple, I had him buy out my interests, by paying my 80,000 dollar lab bill and that way, he could make anything he

**"We got the front page in the Kansas City newspaper showing Herb Robins and myself eating worms, getting the kind of publicity, the majors, with all of their money, could not buy."**

wanted out of the story. I let him use my equipment to finish the movie, which he did accomplish some time later. I saw some of the footage that was shot early in the production at my castle, but I've never seen the film.

*The Aftermath aka Zombie Aftermath – not a Mikels' film. Sid Haig is in it. It was released on video in 1983, long out of print. End of the world. Bikers and mutants in Los Angeles (obviously most of it was filmed in the late 70's evident in hairstyles, bell bottoms etc.) and a couple of normal people that are being protected by some good mutants. Mostly dull but has a couple of entertaining scenes for bad movie lovers.*

**Jarmick: I don't know much about the film Cruise Missile.**

MIKELS: Cruise Missile was a feature being done by my friend and producer, Ika Panajotovic. Ika had a small company, and he often shot his films in Iran. He had shot some of Missile in Iran too. He nearly bought the "farm" when bullets were flying all over the tarmac as his

plane was attempting take-off (during the uprising when the U.S. embassy and the hostages were seized). Ika had filmed in two or three countries, but came back out of money, without half of his movie

being shot. I once more brought in several of my castle ladies to do script-supervising, wardrobe, make-up, craft services, and a couple of my regulars, and we finished his

movie in and outside of Hollywood, and in the area where Six Flags/Magic Mountain is located. I created a Russian army, generals and all, rented appropriate vehicles, and a Russian looking truck, to haul a missile on a launcher. It was fun. We finished Ika's movie for tiny, tiny dollars, shooting over half of it, for a fraction of what it had cost him to shoot in the participating countries abroad. Again, he always thanks me for 'saving his life and movie.' Unfortunately, Ika just passed away after returning from China where his movies were highly praised.

👉 *Cruise Missile AKA Missile X Peter Graves (!) is a U.S. agent sent to find about the murder of an agent who was on the trail of The Baron (Curt Jurgens), a crazed business man who has gotten a Soviet nuclear missile that he wants to use to attack the international conference being held in the Persian Gulf. The film is set in pre-revolution Iran, but completed later as TVM mentioned. The hostage crisis didn't make distribution of this one very easy. Film is*



*rather dull, but interesting for several obvious reasons. John Carradine plays a Russian scientist and is given little to do. You'll hear news broadcasts in the background of Khomeni inciting riots in Paris (as he prepared to return to Iran). Did get a brief video release in the mid 80's.)*

**Jarmick: I find 1979's Ten Violent Women one of your most entertaining films. It's a wild movie and I'll bet there's an interesting story behind it.**

MIKELS: About six or seven of my 'castle ladies' and I sat at the huge long dinner table in my castle, and all were concerned that we were not making a movie.

So, I dug out some scripts, and one, written by an excellent writer, James Gordon White, was called

"The Violent Sex." The entire script was set in a female prison. We talked it over and decided it could be better if we showed how the girls went to prison, so I wrote

a story covering about half of the movie, that I put in front of the prison stuff by Jim White. The girls wanted me to play a 'good guy', a prince who runs off with all the escaped girls in the ending we had created, but I wanted to play a 'bad guy' instead. I guess it was always more challenging to be a bad guy, at least more enjoyable for me. So, I played a 'fence', a bad guy who the girls 'do in' when he tries to take their stolen jewels from them at gunpoint. It also was a very challenging movie to make. I borrowed all the money I could from various sources, got lab deferments, every-

one worked AGAIN without money, and my credit cards bought the 35mm film negative. As always, a tough way to go, but if you're obsessed about movie-making, you do it anyway.


We went all over shooting that one and the further away from Hollywood we got with my big old grip truck, (a ten ton Ford with a 24-foot box, loaded with my gear), the easier it was to get locations to shoot. Hollywood was making it much too difficult with fees, permits, unions, etc. The film was well received, but once more, I got the short end of the stick when I gave the distribution rights to a New York company which then went bankrupt, and gave my prints to another New York distributor, who

**"You know my feature films have grossed the equivalent of between a half to three quarters of a billion dollars, but I've not even seen one-tenth of one-percent of that. It's a crazy business...yet I love making movies"**

denied knowing me. I never got the prints back, nor any money from either distributor.

By this time, I was totally out of the distribution business, sorry to say. Well maybe not that sorry. It was getting too difficult to get theater dates and collect money from theater owners, so getting out of distribution seemed the right thing to do.

It meant, unfortunately, Ten Violent Women got taken away from me and I didn't make anything on it.

 *Ten Violent Women are tired of working in a gold mine. After a min-*

*ing accident they quit, but are broke because they haven't gotten paid, so they decide to rob a jewelry store in Las Vegas. Eventually they get to Leo the Fence who tries to trade them cocaine for the diamonds and then attempts to rip them off. He is thwarted in his attempts in one of the film's most memorable scenes. Some of the girls get caught trying to sell the cocaine and get put into prison. They take showers in their underwear, are tormented by the sadistic lesbian warden and then plan a daring escape. The jewelry store owner is one of the worst actors you'll ever see, and the film feels like it's its own double feature. There's foul language and even a touch of nudity in this one—a rarity in Mikels' films . . . After its regional release it was playing 42nd Street grindhouse theaters and drive-ins in the early '80s and was released on video in the late '80s as Women's Penitentiary. Now on an Image DVD.*

**Jarmick: Little of your work from the 1980's received much distribution, even though you were still actively working on several projects and making films. Tell me about 1980's Devil's Gambit.**

MIKELS: Devil's Gambit was a movie I did for an attorney who dreamed of being an actor. He had the money to make a low budget film so we went to Sturges, in South Dakota, where thirty thousand bikers were holding their yearly run. The city is so small, it was hard to get through the maze of Harley's all over the town. The Hell's Angels, Mongols, and many other biker groups and clubs were there in force. Let me tell



you, thirty-thousand Harleys make a lot of noise. It was an action movie starring Grand Master Tiger Yang. I don't know what the attorney did with the movie after I shot and edited it. He paid me to make it for him and he owned the film. Often movie titles are changed so that you don't have a trace of what happened to it. I don't know what happened to this one. I think it was released.

**Jarmick: In 1982 you wore several hats on a film called Kill the Dragon.**

MIKELS: In Kill the Dragon I was asked by Henry Park to be the executive producer overseeing the martial arts and drama scenes. It featured some Hollywood stunt people, and was released under a different title by European and Asian owners. I also supplied all of the equipment, and scheduled the shoots.

**Jarmick: You were also working on something called: OPERATION: OVERKILL**

MIKELS: Operation: Overkill starred Grand Master Tiger Yang in this martial arts action movie about terrorists. We shot in Reno for three weeks, then back in Hollywood, where I held everything off until I could find the bucks to finish the movie properly. My food and motel bill was over \$28,000 for cast and crew, and transportation ate up every buck I could find.

**Jarmick: Was the film finished?**

MIKELS: We finished it and then the studio wanted me to add some



**You guessed it: a scene from The Worm Eaters. Doesn't seem to be voluntary, does it?**

sex scenes and nudity to the film but I didn't want to do that, so they weren't interested in the film anymore. So the film was never released as far as I know.

**Jarmick: You never finished Space Angels in 1983, did you?**

MIKELS: That's right. I bit off a big chunk when I tried to make Space Angels. I had this space thing with a good script. (Story by Ted V. Mikels, and James Gordon White, screenplay by James Gordon White.) It was extremely ambitious, and I had several budgets in mind. I had aligned the support and input of a number of Hollywood friends and great animators, and we were going to traverse the universe in search for the kidnapped queen of this planet. All of the females were over seven feet tall, wearing near eight-inch spiked platform shoes, with ten inch high coiffures, and all of the actresses I had chosen were over 6 feet tall. When pre-production was announced in Hollywood in the

trade-papers, I had over eighteen-hundred picture/resumes flooding my offices on Hollywood Boulevard. Robert Maine, a very talented and creative animator working with all of the major studios and a good friend, had created eight space-ships, all of which we filmed on 35mm. We never could raise the bucks to do the movie justice, so I put it on hold. It's been in reserve in the event we ever get the necessary budget. Basically, the female warriors travel to all sorts of planets and team up with an updated "Buck Rogers" who assists them in their search. I think the story is still good but until a budget comes from somewhere it will have to remain in limbo. I have used the shots of the space-ships in a few of my other movies however.

**Jarmick: 1985 wasn't a good year.**

MIKELS: Well it was during this period that I lost the Castle in Glendale, forced to sell it and then I


moved everything to Las Vegas. I sold the Castle for less than I should have. I set up my studio in Vegas and I was shooting a lot of commercials, working on various projects, shooting many demo tapes, helping people finish their projects. I was trying to find money to finish some film projects I wanted to do. I was making industrial films and infomercials.

**Jarmick: 1986's War Cat was the first film since Ten Violent Women to get anything resembling distribution in the United States. This is one of those times you were helping someone finish a film right? I read that you took the film over from none other than Ray Dennis Steckler of Those Incredibly Strange Creatures Who Stopped Living and Became Mixed Up Zombies and Rat Pfink a Boo Boo fame.**

MIKELS: A friend who had just graduated from law school wanted to make a movie rather than practice law. He met up with Ray Steckler, and Ray had asked me to be a production supervisor on the movie. I told Ray I didn't belong on anyone's set unless I was the producer/director, but I went along to do just that, and supply all of the equipment. About three days into the shoot, Ray and the producers got into an irreversible conflict, and I was asked to take over. At that time, I also was shooting as a DP, and also training a few of my helpers. I took over after the third day, and spent over a year making that movie. It was an enormous challenge, as the audio tracks became magnetized, and every frame had to be re-lip-synched on my moviola using a magnifying glass to see the lips and place the words

to match. Never have I had a challenge like that. Like in most all of my films I have done, I'm still waiting for my share of proceeds. My 'participations' at one time, I think, I owned pieces of half of the movies in Hollywood, but to this day, I have yet to receive any returns from these 'percentages of participation.' Obviously, I do not do them anymore.

**"I make movies on zero money. I make it on the sheer energy and input I get from interns and people who want to work in the movies and my own energies and abilities and creativity that God gave me."**

 *Warcat aka War Cat aka Angel of Vengeance – A young woman writer gets back to nature, witnesses some survivalists killing a motorcycle gang except for one biker chick who is locked in a cage to be a sex slave. The writer is captured, then tied up and raped (off camera) but she escapes and during a long long chase sequence she gets violent revenge on the nasty survivalists. Meanwhile (probably where the Steckler footage survives) two creeps rob and kill couples. At the end the women writer confronts the two. It was on video in the late 1980's)*

**Jarmick: And when did you get Chad released?**

MIKELS: Well we tried, but it didn't get released. I put Chad together with a few bucks, rented a mountain lion from a trainer and went into the mountains to shoot a

family oriented movie. I shot the county fair 4-H club stuff, the circus atmosphere, Ferris wheel and things I needed. But when the actor who played Chad's grandfather passed away unexpectedly halfway through the movie, I could never recover from that, as I couldn't go forward with the footage I had. It was a very nice story I had written while still in Bend, Oregon, thirty years earlier. I called upon my experiences and exposure to the 4-H clubs, the kids raising animals to be sold at the county fair, and the anguish they experienced when they had to part with their beloved "pets". Chad's prize-winning lamb was killed by a mountain lion the day it captured the blue-ribbon, and Chad went out into the night during a thunder, rain and lightning storm to find it and kill it. He does not succeed, however, and that's the real point of the story. I made a shortened version of it, hoping to hit the family marketplace but I didn't really pursue it all the way. Oh well, whatever you make, it's always something ELSE they want. . . You just have to take a chance. I have been thinking about doing something with Chad actually.

**Jarmick: So something might happen with it?**

MIKELS: Yes, I think so. (chuckles). I received some e-mails from the talented young man who played Chad. His name is Blake Farris. He is now fifteen years older, and he still dreams of being an actor. His is around 24, married and with a child and he wondered if I could use him in The Cauldron, but I have been thinking that perhaps I could do



something with Chad. Perhaps he could play a soldier in Iraq and remember what happened to him in the past.

**Jarmick: You could use 30 minutes or so of the footage you shot.**

MIKELS: Exactly, I spent over \$28,000 on it. And I had this other project that never got finished called Two Feathers and Littlehawk that was going to be a continuation of Chad, but we could never find two young boys who were right to do the part. Now I could use the boy all grown up and create a new movie. I mean how many movies have that kind of casting?

**Jarmick: You might even have some interesting things to include as a DVD extra if you ever get this one made.**

MIKELS: Yes, absolutely.

**Jarmick: So what happened next?**

MIKELS: I managed to finish what wound up being called Mission: Killfast in 1990 using some of what was shot for Operation: Overkill, almost nine years earlier, but the timing wasn't right for that one, I don't believe.

It may have seemed like a long time between movies, but I was still making every movie in 35mm, and the cost was overwhelming. Mission: Killfast was the most expensive film I made, I spent about \$279,000 on the film and I lost money. I was working harder than ever. I was sending out



Coven girl, Malucina, and woman client asking Demonia for "favors" in the latest TVM film, *The Cauldron*.

scripts, my resumes, merchandising plans, etc., to the tune of five or six thousand dollars a year for copying and postage. Someone would say to me: "Oh sure Ted, be glad to take a look at it, overnight the script and budget to me, right away." Almost every time I called two weeks later and my package was still sitting unopened on their desks. And very often my story in a somewhat altered form would hit the screen later under a different name and production by someone else. Good ideas got passed around and stolen.

**Jarmick: That one is going to be released on DVD soon isn't it?**

MIKELS: Media Blasters is going to release Mission: Killfast in September (2003). Shanti and I did a 20-minute video tape interview here in the studio where we talked about the mak-


ing of the movie and sent it to Media Blaster – I'm presuming that will be included on the DVD release. They are also going to release my very first film, Strike Me Deadly, but I don't have a release date on that yet.

🐾 *Mission: Killfast stars Tiger Yang and is a martial arts action film about international arms and weapons dealers selling nuclear detonators to terrorists who intend on blackmailing many nations of the world. There are former centerfold models and hit men, but this one probably wouldn't even get a PG-13 rating. Perhaps it is available now from Media Blaster on DVD)*

**Jarmick: And then in 1997, you finished Dimension in Fear.**

MIKELS: I wanted to do something again on an improvisational

basis. I wrote the scenario, had sixty or seventy pages, explained what I wanted from the actors, and cut them loose. It had been awhile since I had done that, but it was a pleasure, and all seemed to flow so naturally. It's a movie that I hope in time will see itself realized. It's a tale about psychological terror. I guess we actually shot in 1998. In 1999, one of my friends, a distributor, wanted to rep the movie at Cannes, and had asked me to retitle it *City in Terror*, because "Dimension" in his mind, did not translate easily in foreign countries. Contrary to what most people think, foreign markets are extremely selective in what they buy. It's a fallacy that some people believe that foreign countries will buy anything that they cannot sell here in the U.S. The opposite is actually true; as they have quotas, and can only import something when authorized, so they usually only select big major films. I had been holding back on it and we had been talking about making it part of a triple feature to offer to theater owners, but I think most theater owners would rather not give customers three movies for the price of one ticket.


 *Dimension in Fear*—featuring Liz Renay, Dolores Fuller and Shanti, this direct to video release is about a t.v. weather girl who crosses paths with a psycho-killer who has escaped from prison and is trying to kill everyone who testified against him. Eventually the weather girl is kidnapped and the 'shocking' ending conspires. It's only legally available direct from

*Ted and he'll send you an autographed VHS copy for a fair price if you say please.*

**Jarmick: Then we have what seems to be another message-based, exploitation picture, *Apartheid Slave-Women's Justice*, which you released yourself on video in 2000.**

MIKELS: In my castle, there were a number of black girls who wanted to work in my movies, and in Hollywood there was not much offered them in the way of available parts. I promised several of them I would do a script for them and I wrote the *Apartheid* story. I set it aside for a while. I had read a lot about what transpired in some of the African countries. I shot a stage play for a troupe of black ladies in my studio in Las Vegas, and when they read my script, they begged me to make it into a movie they could be a part of in Long Beach, Calif. So, I loaded up one of my vans, and went to Long Beach. I taught three ladies how to run cameras, and I played the part of the evil, murderous, rapist landowner who was ordered to leave their country but wouldn't. The landowner was tried and sentenced to death by the empowered female court consisting of his previous slaves and mistresses. They disposed of him in a bloody and surprising manner. I shot it as if it were done live in an African country just after a bloody civil war and uprising. A woman from Kenya told me, after seeing the movie, that I portrayed it exactly as it was for females there. She had her home taken away from her. She thought every black woman who had ever been mistreated

should see the movie.


 *Apartheid Slave-Women's Justice* was shot in 1997. It feels like like a morality stage play shot on film with some stock footage added in for production value. It's available direct from TVM as an autographed video tape and it may be released in the future by Image on DVD.

**Jarmick: And then we come to *Corpse Grinders 2*.**

MIKELS: Again, I had no money but I did have a lot of credit cards. I'm happy that so many people LOVE working on my movies, so I put together a great cast, and shot it here in Nevada. I had some excellent visual effects created by my nephew who owns a company here in Las Vegas called Master FX. *Starship Space-Wars*, etc. We had a lot of fun with aliens visiting earth for food supplies. As these aliens were descendents of the 'cat-people of Atlantis' the only food they could find to feed the starving populations on their planet was *'Lotus Cat Food, for Cats Who Love People'*. The first *Corpse Grinders* I did in 1969-70. When I finished and released it, did such outstanding business that it was listed by *Box Office* magazine as number eleven of the top fifty grossing films in the United States—a phenomenon at any time. In Hollywood in its multiple showings, it totally out grossed every other major motion picture playing. Hence, my motivation to do CG-2, which is a big step above the production of the first *Grinders*, which even after thirty-some years is still going strong



in the marketplace, and Image Entertainment just released it into the U.S. and Canada on DVD. In July, 2002, Image also released CG-2 on DVD in the U.S. and Canada. I hope to get it into all the major countries that buy U.S. movies.


 *Corpse Grinders 2 – The starving cat-people of the planet Ceta have lost a battle with the Planet Traxis and find themselves on Earth and needing food. They stumble upon Lotus Cat Food and must transport a huge quantity of it to the planet Ceta. This is sure to keep mortuaries busy and make Landau and Maltby very rich, right? Very low budget with cheesy effects best suited for the non-discriminating 12-year-old boy trapped inside of you. Now available on DVD from Image and through TVM's website on VHS).*

**Jarmick: And that led directly to your production in 2001 of Mark of the Astro-Zombies (MOTAZ)**

MIKELS: I thought why not re-imagine Astro-Zombies from 1967? I worked so hard on that film and received absolutely NOTHING for writing, co-producing, directing, supplying all of the equipment, shooting half of the original movie myself, editing it, creating the promotional material for the release... it was time to me to reclaim Astro-Zombies I thought. I had no money **again**, but found good people from all over the world who were willing to travel at their own expense and pay their own cost of living to work on MOTAZ.

**Jarmick: A very interesting cast makes up MOTAZ.**

MIKELS: I had about two thousand picture/resumes submitted and hundreds of technicians, composers, etc., who wanted to be a part of the production. My nephew Bo Hansen and his son Jason, did special visual effects again. David White did blood effects and sets. Jay Gowey and Michael Haegle did prosthetics, and Dennis L. Phelps did my web site. I asked *Brinke Stevens*, *Liz Renay*, and the leading lady from my first A-Z, *Tura Satana*, to be a part of my cast, and they happily participated, all saying they had a GREAT time making the movie. There were many talented actors, actresses and technicians who tell me that it was the experience of their lives. People have been saying fantastic things about the film at various screenings we have had and so I was trying to borrow \$100,000 to get the film released into some theaters. Then some investors got in touch with me to possibly do a double feature theatrical package and maybe even shoot *Doll Squad 2* with a decent budget.

 *Mark of the Astro-Zombies – Aliens who inhabit a giant asteroid are creating world wide panic by ordering the Astro-Zombies to terrorize and kill innocent men, women and children. Can the U.S. and some friendly aliens stop them before it is*

*too late? Tura Satana and the spirit of John Caradine are back along with Brinke Stevens, and Liz Renay. It's cheap, cheesy and perhaps your kind of guilty pleasure fun. It's available direct from Ted's website).*

**Jarmick: Are you going to show some of these films at film festivals or horror conferences?**

MIKELS: I have put my life into making movies and I have spent most of my life trying to pay off the more than half million dollars it has cost me to make prints for theatres and drive-ins and I'm still waiting, believe it or not, to find a way to make a living. I'm not interested in just having my expenses paid to do the festival type thing because it doesn't cut it. It doesn't pay phone bills, it doesn't pay for the rent of the studio. I have two to three-thousand dollars just in equipment payments because the equipment has to be constantly updated and I have to get something out of it or it isn't worth it to me to go to these festivals and things.

It's like people tell me that I

**"Everyone in the world, it seems, is making a movie right now, right? Tens of thousands are being made as we speak, by anyone who has a little digital camcorder... When everyone in the world is growing potatoes, who are you going to sell your potatoes to?"**

ought to go to all these shows and conventions and I explain, "Hey, if they take care of my air fare and my hotel accommodations, give me a table and some

guarantee that I will come home with a few bucks, I'll go. But I'm not going to pay my own air fare, and then buy a table at these things so I



Excuse me, I see that you're busy, but could you tell me where is the nearest Chucky Cheese? Oh all right, it's really a scene of Kardak transporting a headless body in the latest TVM film, *The Cauldron*.

can sell a couple of videos or DVDs."

**Jarmick: That seems to make good business sense. Besides, you could be making money doing some commercials or corporate videos or conducting your teaching seminars.**

MIKELS: I have to make sure I cover about \$7,000 in expenses every month. So I can only go to these shows and festivals if I know my costs are covered and usually they have been. It's only been in the last couple of years that promoters are not willing to guarantee a minimum of money to someone like me for attending.

**Jarmick: And you have more movies to make, right?**

MIKELS: Everyone in the world, it seems, without exception is making a movie now, right? Tens of thousands are being made right now as we speak, by everyone who has a little digital camcorder, hoping they will

break into the big time and make millions. Little do they know that they may never even get lunch money back for their efforts. When everyone in the world is growing potatoes, who are you going to sell your potatoes to?

**Jarmick: Ted, tell me about the one you're working on now.**

MIKELS: I am working on *The Cauldron*. It will be done on credit cards; it will be done with a lot of improvisation. Actually, even though I can't afford it, I'm making it.

**Jarmick: Even though you can't afford it?**

MIKELS: Never stopped me before.

**Jarmick: You've written it to fit the budget right?**

MIKELS: It will be very low budget, probably fifteen to eighteen-thousand dollars. I'm shooting it on on Beta-cam Sp.

**Jarmick: You don't have to rent any equipment do you?**

MIKELS: I won't rent any equipment. I own everything I need. I have 27 microphones of every size and type, I have cables coming out of my ears, If I had a lighting crew of 30 we couldn't use all my lights...

**Jarmick: So, do you rent a truck sometimes?**

MIKELS: I own two. I have a five-ton grip truck and a van. I have fish poles and squirrel cages for the microphones; I have edit bays; I have triple headed movieolas; I have every one-inch, beta, hi-8. I have every known medium – except 70-millimeter and HDTV.

**Jarmick: Do you rent out your edit bays?**

MIKELS: No, no. I don't usually get into my studio until about three or so and folks who rent would want to come in at about 6 o'clock in the morning, which is only a couple of hours after I usually retire. I don't have an engineer, either. I learned how to wire everything up myself, how to work everything. Oh, I've had some help in the past where I bought a piece of equipment and someone will go show me how to hook it up. So, I do all my audio mixing, putting in the music and all that stuff.

**Jarmick: A one-man band.**

MIKELS: I've never even done ADR's – you know, dialogue replacements. When I need to replace some dialogue I do it with trickery, not by



calling in the actors again and having them re-record their lines. I have a friend who spent \$48,000 on ADR work for his movie. I spent \$18,000 on my whole film. He had to pay because he didn't know how to do it, and went to an ADR studio where they charge quite a bit.

When I'm shooting, if I think there's going to be a need for automatic dialogue replacement, I do it right there on the spot. I have the actor re-record his lines, so I have it and don't have to call him back to do ADR.

**Jarmick: You've worked with so many people who have gone on to make important contributions to other films and in the entertainment business both behind and in front of the camera and I would like to ask you to comment on some of the people you worked with.**

MIKELS: It's hard for me to talk about any of the people I have worked with. I'll try, but I won't say bad things about anyone. I work totally alone, and even though I have been asked many times to make a movie as a partner with someone else, I really do not do that. I have my own ideas, and really don't want input from others who may not think the same as I do. I have many friends, but wouldn't really want to make a movie with any of them. I love doing my own thing.

**Jarmick: Tell me a little bit about Al Adamson as people often confuse your careers.**

MIKELS: As for Al Adamson, he was making a movie in Utah some years ago. I received a call from location from Leslie MacRae, who

**When I'm shooting, if I think there's going to be a need for automatic dialogue replacement, I do it right there on the spot. I have the actor re-record his lines, so I have it and don't have to call him back to do ADR.**

was working in his movie, and had done two or three for me, *Girl in Gold Boots*, *Blood Orgy of the She-Devils*, Etc. Leslie tells me she is working on a movie that she swears is a Ted V. Mikels movie, *The Female Bunch*. When she started to tell me about the movie being shot, I asked her if such and such was part of it. She replied "yes", then I proceeded to tell her the story as I had written the script some time earlier with a producer from Europe. I have no idea how Al Adamson got the script, and who he did it with, but it was the script I wrote. Al probably didn't know it was my script. I never asked him about it. That is about as far as you can go saying my movies could get mixed up with his. Watch mine and his, and see for yourself.

**Jarmick: You never pursued legal action or getting any money out of this for yourself?**

MIKELS: It's easy for me to dream up stories and there's no reason for me to get bitter about this kind of thing because it happens all the time in the industry. The European producer I wrote the script for and I parted ways and I lost track of the guy. I suppose if the film had made hundreds-of-millions of dollars and

there was something to go after, I might have done something. But, I want to make movies, not sue people or worry about that kind of thing.

You know, Al actually came to my studio here in Vegas in the 1990's because he wanted me to put a crew together and rent my equipment for 24-hours or so. He also lived in Vegas. This was a couple of years before he died.

(NOTE: Al Adamson was brutally murdered Indio, CA in July of 1995 by a contractor he had hired to renovate his home. Adamson was 66.).

He wanted to rent my equipment for a special deal for one day, because he didn't want to spend much money. He was going to work the crew for something like 36-hours straight and pay for one day rental of my equipment, but get three or four days worth out of that one day rental. I just said, "Al, no, I can't let people I know work for you under those conditions, and it's not good for my equipment to be abused like that either."

**Jarmick: Most people know Wayne Rogers from television's *Mash* and *House Calls*, but he produced exploitation movies with you in the 1960's.**

MIKELS: Wayne Rogers was a fun guy to work with. He was an expert in finance, as that was his schooled profession. Everything was funny with Wayne, and he loved campy things. We did *The Doctors* (Ted refers to Dr. Sex M.D. as *The Doctors*, it was one of two sexploitation film he wrote and directed) together in the early 1960's. That's

why when I gave him my story, The Astro Zombies, he wanted us to do it campy. I did three projects with Wayne.

**Jarmick: You know the legendary producer David Friedman pretty well, don't you?**

MIKELS: David Friedman is a friend I became better acquainted with in recent years. I knew him briefly in Hollywood since the sixties, but never really got to know him until visiting and chatting with him at film shows in the last few years. He invites Shanti and myself to the Showman's League Banquet and yearly meeting held here in Las Vegas. They are very enjoyable and festive.

**Jarmick: Bill Bagdad was a wonderful supporting actor you used in three of your films. Where did he come from?**

MIKELS: Bill, I believe, worked for Dave Friedman in She Freak and he came over to my offices one day and I cast him as the hunchback in Astro-Zombies. He was a great guy and very easy to work with. I said if he wanted to work in Girl in Gold Boots, we'd have to make him look different. He got the suit and slicked his hair back and came up with that eye and head twitch bit for the movie.

**Jarmick: It worked very well for the movie. Did any of the actors complain he was stealing scenes?**

MIKELS: Oh no, not at all. Never had anything like that on any of the

movies I've been on. And I also used Bill again on The Doll Squad and he did a wonderful job in that one too. He went off to do some gold mining with some people I knew and I didn't use him on my next couple of movies. Then, unfortunately, he got throat cancer and died a few years back. He was a great guy.

**Jarmick: You worked on Orgy of the Dead with Ed Wood.**

MIKELS: Steve Apostolof and I had a number of mutual friends in

**"I have nothing to say about other filmmakers. At least no one on earth can say my movie looks like something, someone else has done. I am not a copy-cat, and in fact LOVE doing things no one else does."**

Hollywood, and when he had Bob Caramico shooting Orgy of the Dead for him, (I gave Bob his start and first job in Hollywood as a cameraman.) Bob asked me to do the favor of lighting it for him, as one of my specialties is effects lighting, and I was helping Bob get his union card. The shoot in the studio demanded very creative lighting, which I dearly love to do. I did it as a lark and a favor. Ed Wood was there, but he was just another member of the crew. Nobody really knew him. His films had not been "re-discovered" yet. We created some great effects with Criswell and spider webs and things, but only a little bit of what I did is in the film. Long after I was done with the movie, the footage of the strippers and all of that terrible stuff was added. A completely different movie than the one I worked on. You must remember that in the mid-sixties, nobody really

knew Ed Wood or his movies. Wood became known after the movie Ed Wood was made about him only a short time ago. People ask me what it was like working with him. I just do my job when making a movie, and don't really pay much attention to anyone else.

**Jarmick: John Carradine. . . .**

MIKELS: John Carradine was an absolute treasure. A man of so many talents. I had about four movie involvements with him. Once you work with him, you never forget him, and when you are his director he gives you the utmost respect. If only there were more like him still around.

**Jarmick: Tura Satana. . .**

MIKELS: Tura Satana is so special, it's hard to say short words about her. A real trouper, gives her all, wanting to please and play her parts well. Extremely cooperative, and willing, and creative. In her three movies with me, she has been a real asset. Her family and kids will always be very close to my heart. We e-mail each other every day.

**Jarmick: Did you ever think you would wind up good friends with Tura? It doesn't seem you have that much in common.**

MIKELS: (a knowing laugh) Oh we have a lot in common.

**Jarmick: Oh?**

MIKELS: Let's just say we would not have remained such close friends, E-mail each other every day through all these years if we did not have a great affinity for each other.





**Coven Girls searching witchcraft store for coven/witch activities.**

**Jarmick: Arch Hall . . .**

MIKELS: I knew Arch Hall, Sr. very well, visited him in his home many times, and of course, he is the original writer of the first script version of *The Corpse Grinders*. I read many of his scripts and all were extremely creative. I had wanted to make movies of several of his other screenplays, but you know how tough it is to put together any money for movies, so we never got around to it.

**Jarmick: Michael Ansara.**

MIKELS: Michael Ansara is a gentleman's gentleman. Extremely professional on the set (*Doll Squad*), and a very nice person off set. I really wanted to have Michael with me on more movies, as he is such a fine actor, but again, how do you get the financing to do it?

**Jarmick: You know Roger Corman**

**pretty well too, right?**

MIKELS: I know Roger Corman from us doing movies in Hollywood at the same time. Actors and actresses and technicians would go back and forth to my offices from his offices, and to his offices from mine. I think we knew what each other was doing before anyone else did. He and I exchanged movies as second features for each other's new releases. In the days of double features, you always had a new release, accompanied by a movie that had already played that particular city or town.

**"There was always 7 or 8 girls and when I would take them someplace they were lovely beautiful girls and no one would ever understand how this one guy with the funky beard and moustache could be with all the girls. They were the ones who started telling people they were my wives. That's where that rumor started."**

That movie then became the second feature, so Roger's company and mine, often used each other's previous releases for our second features, or "B" part of the bill as it was known then.

**Jarmick: You met a lot of people doing commercials and promo's. Chris Rock, The Smothers Brothers, Milton Berle.**

MIKELS: I have made so many commercials, I can't remember them all. About Chris Rock, I put together, with him in my editing bay, a short video of him playing an extremely funny part. This was before he got his break. Most of the people in front of the cameras, really appreciate input from someone they believe really knows what he is saying and doing, and can help them. Even Milton Berle, when I photographed him, had his own lighting and make-up man with him. After I worked with him a very short

time, his lighting and make-up person backed off and let me do my thing with both make-up and lighting. They told Mr. Berle (about me) "this man knows what he is doing, rest easy."

With Joe DiMaggio, The Smothers Brothers, Rowan and Martin, Phil Silvers, and many others, they were all very nice and easy to work with. The Smothers Brothers made me laugh so hard, which I normally would never do when shooting, I couldn't keep my eye in the viewfinder.

**Jarmick: Okay, lets talk about The Castle, your magnificent house in Glendale.**

MIKELS: Yes, we had some wonderful times in The Castle.

**Jarmick: That's certainly what they say. You had a lot of women, at least ten, staying in your castle and there was talk about you being a polygamist and having all these rules for the women who lived in the castle. Now, I realize it was the late 60's and early 70's we are talking about . . .**

MIKELS: (laughs) It was an honorable situation but people made things out of it, as people always will.

**Jarmick: Really?**

MIKELS: Really. And there were two rules for the women who stayed there: be responsible and no sleeping around. Everyone was expected to keep their word and honor their agreements.

We didn't discourage the rumors though. We had fun with all of that. I would take the girls to parties and the men, of course, would try to pick them up. They were pretty women and so sometimes they would tell them that they were my girlfriend or that they were my wife. Well, one time an actor comes up to me at a party and asks me what the deal is. I said, 'What do you mean?', and he said that he's talked to at least four women at the party who insist they are my wife. I shrugged. 'Well, who am I to argue with that?' The girls and I really enjoyed blowing people's minds with that kind of thing. There's a lot of jealous people out there, I think, too.

We had fun, but it was an honor-

able place. The girls were at The Castle because they could stay there for free in exchange for working or acting in my movies. They couldn't bring boyfriends in to shack up with. It's not what people thought, but then... let them think what they want about that.

**Jarmick: Sherri Vernon.**

MIKELS: Sherri is a marvelous girl, we are still very close, she is very close to my family. She was partially instrumental in helping me raise the last two of my six children. They have good memories of her. She was a hard taskmaster. I mean, I did the cooking and shopping and all that, but she supervised the placing of furniture and discipline.

**Jarmick: She kept the girls in line?**

MIKELS: Yeah, she did. She was pretty tough. She never fought with the girls, never was a problem. But she was looked upon as the leader. She was first, you know. When I got The Castle, she's the one that helped me pick The Castle. So they kind of looked upon her as The Castle Queen and they still call her that.

**Jarmick: Well you two had been together for two or three years before the Castle right?**

MIKELS: That's true.

**JARMICK: She started working for you on your films behind the scenes, right?**

MIKELS: Yes, I remember she was doing the make-up on Corpse Grinders, and the woman who was going to do the part of the woman who answers the door. She had some kind of emergency with the babysitter and had to leave. It took

us a long part of the day to rig up the water, we had to put up rain pipes and hoses – and then she couldn't stay. I went to Sherri and I said, "Okay, put the makeup away, get dressed and put some make-up on yourself. You're going in front of the cameras. So I had her in front of the cameras in like five minutes. She did so well that every time I threw the cat at her, I thought the cat was killing her and I would jump in front of the camera to try and save her...

**Jarmick: She was mentioned in a lot of credits for your movies.**

MIKELS: Yeah that's true. For instance, she even did the artwork for the titles of The Worm Eaters.

**Jarmick: That's probably the best thing about that movie.**

MIKELS: Oh yes, absolutely. I've been asked by a few people to actually take my name off of that thing. What's the point? I didn't direct it. Yeah, the artwork and titles she did, the face-eating worms she did not do.

**Jarmick: But you know you need some face-eating worms in your life sometimes.**

MIKELS: (laughing) I guess you do, yes.

**Jarmick: So were you more-or-less a one woman man then, meaning Sherri?**

MIKELS: Well now, let's just say that Sherri was there first. She was the queen of the castle. And she believed in sharing and splitting up the tasks that needed to be done.

She's still called the Queen of the Castle by others.

**JARMICK: How many others?**

MIKELS: There were usually eight to ten women living in the castle and over the years when I had The Castle, there were probably about thirty women.

**Jarmick: Did any of them come with you to Las Vegas?**

MIKELS: Yes, about four. No, no there was that adorable young Asian girl too. There were six, I guess that came out here to Las Vegas with me. I had been promised financing for a studio. They were out here for maybe about a year, but the studio didn't happen like it was supposed to.

**Jarmick: And Doc Wendy?**

MIKELS: She is my significant other. She's a psychotherapist, has a doctorate and appears in my off-beat films as Shanti.

**Jarmick: How did you meet?**

MIKELS: A long story, but I was looking to buy some land for my studio because I thought some money was coming in from these investors I was working with. She was trying to find some land for this project she was putting together to help young children who didn't have families and homes.

**Jarmick: Did you have a lot in common?**

MIKELS: She had made lots of commercials and had been a model and a dancer. She was a Bluebell dancer. Madame Bluebell is still doing okay and they just had a reunion not long ago where she flew in from France. Wendy graduated from the Royal Academy of Dance before she became a Bluebell dancer. It's ballet-type dancing, not topless or anything

like that. She danced all over the world and she came from Paris to do the LIDO show in Las Vegas and also wound up making lots of commercials as she went to school to become a doctor.

**Jarmick: And you've been together since 1985?**

MIKELS: I first met her in 1985 and we've been together since about 1986, yes. She's been in every movie I've made since I moved to Las Vegas as Shanti.

**Jarmick: And Sherri Vernon and the other castle girls?**

MIKELS: Well, out or respect for Shanti, we don't talk about the girls. She has met Tura, and Sherri and a few of them. She actually likes Sherri very much.

**Jarmick: Will Sherri have a guest appearance in The Cauldron?**

MIKELS: Oh, I would love to have her in the film but no I am doing this on such a miniscule budget I can't bring her in for this. Sherri moved to Hawaii about 12 years ago, she's on her own and very happy and we are still very good friends.

**Jarmick: It's nineteen years ago you sold The Castle and yet people are still fascinated with Ted V. Mikels and The Castle.**

MIKELS: We had lots of fun. But things have changed. You know we never had any difficulties at The Castle – ever. There were some reporters from the local paper at the shoot the other night and they asked me, well what was it, Ted? Was it a film school for girls, or was it your harem? And I could only answer

them by saying, "Well, you'll never know...will you?" (He chuckles.)

There were always seven or eight girls and when I would take them someplace they were lovely beautiful, and no one would ever understand how this one guy with the funky beard and moustache could be with all the girls. They were the ones who started telling people they were my wives. That's where that rumor started. Just kidding around. It was all pretty reserved. We had Halloween parties and New Years' parties, people had fun.

**Jarmick: Now you say that and people start thinking... there were maybe orgies at this castle?**

MIKELS: No no, nothing like that all. We did not allow drunkedness, we didn't allow drugs, we didn't allow anyone chasing anyone. It was more like family style.

They kind of formed a sisterhood. Some are still in the business and working. One was a production manager on some big movies, one wrote, directed and produced her own movie, others have done various jobs from script supervision to make-up. A lot of what they did they learned from me and working on my movies. Out of the four or five-thousand people whom I've worked with and helped get started in Hollywood, among them were some of the girls in the castle.

**Jarmick: Was Leslie McRea (Death Race2000) a Castle lady?**

MIKELS: No, Leslie McRea came into the studio and I don't why, I just kind of liked her. She was not very self-centered despite having



won twenty-three beauty contests, and was like Jody Daniels whom I cast as Critter in that same movie (The Girl with Gold Boots). With Leslie there was something nice about her. She had that certain quality . . . it was her first movie. I put a lot of people in their first movie.

**Jarmick: I think of all your movies I like Girl in Gold Boots the best.**

MIKELS: Well, thank you very much. You know, here it is August 10, 2003 and Girl in Gold Boots was on television here last Saturday. It is almost forty years later and they are still watching and enjoying my movies.

**Jarmick: That's what its about right? People enjoying your movies.**

MIKELS: Oh yes. It's still exciting when people tell me how much they enjoy my films. I hear from people all the time.

**Jarmick: I mean even if they aren't enjoying them exactly in the way you would like, the important thing is that the movies are being enjoyed..**

MIKELS: What I hear is only the good stuff. I used to tell the people I work with and the girls at the castle, anyone who wants to do what you are doing, will never speak well of you. In other words, they feel by criticizing you they can pull themselves up a rung on the ladder. They are smart enough to be able to criticize you.

**Jarmick: It was tough for you to lose The Castle.**

MIKELS: Yes, very.

**Jarmick: Yet, you kept going.**

MIKELS: Well there were promis-

es made when I left The Castle that I would have financing for movies and a studio if I relocated to Las Vegas. So, I hated to do it, but I had too much debt and I had to sell The Castle. But it never came to be. I was told that I would be financed the minute I moved to Las Vegas. So, I moved and there was no financing as promised. There were many attempts to put together a fifteen-million dollar deal but it never happened. The people were not successful in doing it. They meant

**"Nothing really comes up to my expectations. I always want more than what I get."**

well; they tried hard. They floated some stock and all that but it just didn't happen. So, I've been on my own and doing it any which way I can. I've made a lot of movies since.

**Jarmick: And along the way you made mistakes.**

MIKELS: Oh yeah, gut-wrenching, blood, sweat and tears. And always, I've had the debts. I have had a lifetime of debt. One of the biggest mistakes I made was soon after I hired a financial advisor. Some friends convinced me to hire a financial advisor and I said, but I don't have any money. They said that's why you need a financial advisor. So about four days after I hired this guy we took out a second mortgage on The Castle for a quarter million dollars. Biggest mistake I ever made. I should have made another Corpse Grinders for \$1,700 dollars. I had almost paid off The Castle and then I had this huge

monthly payment to worry about all the time.

**Jarmick: That usually catches up with people and just sucks out all of their energy.**

MIKELS: You know when I was doing distribution I would go on the hook for sixty, eighty, or one-hundred-thousand dollars, I was a dumb kid, paying for the movie prints on credit like I did. They gave me credit back then. These prints I would use to play theaters around the country and they would disappear. I wouldn't get money, I wouldn't get the prints back. Sometimes though, money did come back, like in Corpse Grinders because I was the distributor, the money came back directly to me. But usually when I gave my prints to other distributors, I never saw any money.

**Jarmick: You didn't chase after the people who owed you money?**

MIKELS: I gave up chasing them down. I just figure I should keep on making the movies. If I make enough of them, the spillover will come back to me. Half of my life has been buying and paying for prints of my movies to play in theaters and praying that some money comes back as a result.

**Jarmick: But the idea of letting that go. . .**

MIKELS: It's beyond the concept of just making a movie— Above and beyond, inside of and way outside of it all. Just making the movie is the easy part. Making these prints, and going into distribution and marketing and putting your prints into

the hands of theater people and all across the country with sub distributors and watching over them and going into debt at a hundred-thousand or two-hundred thousand at a time...it's overwhelming. That is what made the making of the movie the easy part. The only fun, easy part is making the movie itself and that, sometimes could take a year or more and could be tough, too.

**Jarmick: Even making them with one- and two-minute short-ends.**

MIKELS: Very tough to do, but it's still fun to make a movie and what I want to be doing.

**Jarmick: You just keep on going and somehow you don't let this stuff zap your energy.**

MIKELS: Oh sometimes it zaps the energy, but you have no choice. You either do it or you don't do it. So I keep on going. I don't have time to wait and worry about things. What else am I going to do? I made a promise that when I get to be 104 years old I'll slow down and play golf or something.

**Jarmick: What are some of your mistakes?**

MIKELS: Struggling too hard to try and get perfection in a scene or how a line is delivered by a performer. Sometimes it's better to go into a different direction.

**JARMICK: Why? Why not get it perfect?**

MIKELS: Well, let's say you've only got a certain amount of film and you've got enough to do your movie, but if you keep using it on an actor who keeps blowing his

lines, you are dead in the water. So you do things. You change his lines, You do things that are not going to destroy your ability to finish a movie. That is what I mean. Another misake is not going with the flow. When you get something that people like, go with it.

**Jarmick: So you make compromises.**

MIKELS: Always. Tremendous compromises. I never get my vision on my film. If you want to finish your film and make another one, you have to make compromises. See, nothing I have ever done comes up to my own expectations. Nothing. So, when people ask me what is my favorite movie, I tell them, "I haven't made it yet." Nothing really comes up to my expectations. I always want more than what I get.

I make movies on zero money. I make it on the sheer energy and input I get from interns and people who want to work in the movies, and my own energies and abilities and creativity that God gave me. That is how I make it and there is no other way.

**Jarmick: And you won't stop...**

MIKELS: No I won't stop.

**Jarmick: How do you keep doing that?**

MIKELS: Well I don't know...I'm just driven to do it. I can't stop. A lot of people say once the bug bites, nothing else does it for them. Most people look for money to make it happen and maybe the difference in my motivation is that I don't look for money to make it happen, I just get

to making it happen, anyway I can. If I waited for money I probably would never get to make a movie.

**Jarmick: So you keep going.**

MIKELS: I keep going. These people who have promised me the money for Doll Squad 2, they have also promised to raise the money for what has been my pet project for over forty years. This is my Beowulf. I've got the screenplay, it is one of the finest screenplays that exists. People at Paramount read it and Charles Bludhorn told his son to do that movie, he is one of the only people who has ever read it, and he died two weeks later, and then Paramount tried to buy it from me. They wanted to make it smaller because it cost too much money to do it. Too many characters, and at that time the animation wasn't as advanced as it is now; it would cost much too much money.

I said, "No, if I don't direct and produce it, I will burn it."

So they said, "Where are you going to get a hundred million."

I said that I could do it for 20 million.

So, my feeling is this, if these people actually come through with the money to do the 35-millimeter for the prints of CG-2 and MOTAZ, then there is a real possibility that they will be able to finance Doll Squad 2 and maybe Beowulf.

**Jarmick: And if it doesn't happen?**

MIKELS: Well I'm not waiting around. I try to stay alive by continuing my seminars, where my stu-

*continued on page 25*

# THE AUTHOR'S FAB 5

I've picked five films that I consider Ted's best and most essential films. They are also all available on DVD from IMAGE. Ted's films were made to be part of double and triple features and were perfect for drive-in movies. They were all made with budgets that would barely cover the doughnut and coffee bill on a medium budget film today. Don't expect a lot of gore or nudity in Ted's films either.

## 5. TEN VIOLENT WOMEN

**1979 - 95 minutes/ WIDE SCREEN**

The women in prison sub genre was jumpstarted by Producer Roger Corman and Jack Hill's *The Big Doll House* (1971) and perfected by Jonathan Demme with 1974's *Caged Heat*. *Ten Violent Women* is actually two genre movies in one. The first part is a bad women heist movie, the second is a women's prison movie. There's even a bit of nudity (a rarity in most of Mikels' films. (However, we do have the spectacle of most women keeping their underwear on during the prison shower scene!) As usual, Mikels' ideas are way too big for the tiny budget. He wants to do way too much in several directions, resulting in a fascinating mess.

There's not much that's original about *Ten Violent Women* except the way in which Mikels reworks the scraps of several genre films to create a very entertaining movie. If nothing else, you'll probably be mesmerized with how Mikels' mind seems to work. There's a strong 1940s era melodramatic undercurrent at work in the film, combined with modern exploitation elements and up-to-date '70s plot points. It doesn't make much sense, but things move fast enough and you're not supposed to think too much about it anyway. I mean, we're talking about a film that begins with women working a gold mine, pulling off a very complicated jewelry heist, getting sent to prison for selling drugs, having to break out of prison

by fooling the fifty-something lesbian warden and winding up involved with Arab oil sheiks. They just don't make movies like this anymore, folks. There are also funny little inter-titles sprinkled throughout the film which give the film a sense of style in an old Quinn Martin television show kind of way. Titles that say things like *The Plot Thickens* or *The Escape*. The film features a supporting performance by Frank Walshe (as a jewelry store owner) that is perhaps one of the worst things I have ever seen on film (and consequently a great reason to watch this film as soon as possible). You also have Mikels himself doing a decent job of playing a character named Leo the Fence whose demise is memorable (and Mikels would use the idea again in his direct to video *Apartheid Slave-Women's Justice*).

Mikels, by not paying attention to thematic consistency, has actually made a mockery of the women in prison and women with guns genres by creating one of the oddest un-intentional parody films ever made. It's ridiculous, absurd, sloppy and lots of fun.

The image quality of the film is not very good and several scenes are too dark, but this is the fault of the film prints used, not the digital transfer which is free from noticeable compression or edge enhancement problems. You can't expect Image to spend thousands of dollars restoring the film print for a film like this—it just isn't going to happen. Ted's full length audio commentary on the DVD is often a lot of fun to listen to as he give us trivia, and makes fun of the film too.



# FILMS BY T.V. MIKELS

However there are many quiet lapses when he says little and he would have benefited from having someone interviewing him and keeping him talking.

## 4. ASTRO-ZOMBIES

If you have enjoyed cult movies for a while, you know this one by heart. The film is a mess and it has several scenes where John Carradine plays for several minutes with the switches and dials on his very cheap looking army surplus mad scientist equipment while spouting out the kind gibberish you would expect a bored child of six playing mad scientist to come up with. They are the kinds of scenes you would think only about 30-sec-



onds of which would ever make it onto the screen—but there's several minutes of them, here. Not once, but a few times. Carradine ad-libbed quite a bit, as you'll see. I tell you this because the first time you see the film these scenes feel almost interminable in length and drag the film down. You could edit out

almost 20 minutes of this already short film and not lose much at all. Don't despair, be patient, you've never quite seen a movie like *Astro-Zombies* before. Obviously this is a film for those who truly appreciate low-budget genre films. It is not as stultifying, head-scratching, laugh-out loud funny bad as an Ed Wood film—instead there's moments when it's obvious some good original ideas are lurking within. The film also knows it's goofy and there's an intentional deadpan camp feel to it that usually works (as opposed to trying

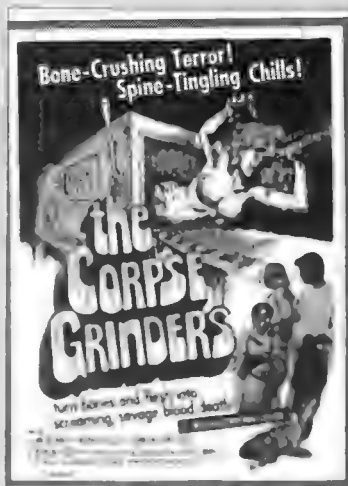
too hard and being annoying). You also get Tura Satana in another tougher-than-nails role that eventually pays off with a too-short scene between her and Carradine that you have to see to believe. Bill Bagdad plays the mad scientist's assistant as only Bagdad could. There's a little more blood than the usual Mikels film (but rate this one PG at most). The second or third time you watch the film, you'll really appreciate everything that's going on—or in some cases not going on with the movie. The two complicated and over ambitious plots of the movie converge and a good time was had by all. Thank you Ted.

The DVD is a completely bare-bones, no frills offering. No commentary, no documentary, no featurette, no interviews. The print of the film used for the digital transfer isn't in perfect shape but it looks much better on the DVD than any other time I've ever seen the film. Available from IMAGE.

## 3. Corpse Grinders

One of Ted V. Mikels' cheapest (\$17,000 total budget) films is also one of his best known. The Lotus Cat Food company, uses ground up corpses as a cheap cat food ingredient. Some fresher meat is used too! Then cats attack their owners now hungry for human flesh. The movie has inventive production values, total lack of continuity in terms of wardrobe, strange edits and some just plain bizarre lines of dialogue, which all add up to a film that is unique, entertaining, and a must-see for anyone who enjoys low-budget cult horror films. It was first released in 1970 and then became part of the famous triple feature bill starting in 1972 that played drive in movies and some hard tops for over a decade: *The Undertaker and His Pals*, *Corpse Grinders* and *The Embalmer*. All films distributed by Ted's distribution company. DVD is avail-

# THE AUTHOR'S FAB 5



able from IMAGE.

## 2. DOLL SQUAD

**D**OLL SQUAD is one of Ted V. Mikels' best films—a low budget drive-in movie that's goofy, creative, fast paced, usually interesting, and a lot of fun. It's a predecessor of

Charlie's Angels (both have a team of spy girl characters led by a girl named Sabrina) and it plays like a Bond inspired knock-off—complete with a ruthless villain intent on ruling the world. It was one of his most expensively produced films at \$256,000, but it looks like a film that cost three times that much! Doll Squad luxuriates in '70s tackiness in just about every way you can imagine: shag carpeting, big-haired women with large eye-lashes, polyester outfits and dialogue peppered with the slang and vernacular of the time. It's aged better than platforms, hot rocks, mood rings and disco combined!

The plot concerns an insane villain who blows up an experimental space flight and delivers a message



to a famous Senator (John Carter) via closed circuit television. A C.I.A.-type director (Anthony Eisley) consults with a super computer nicknamed Bertha who advises that the best hope the U.S. has is The Doll Squad. That brings big red-haired, busty, long-legged Sabrina (Francine York) onto the scene. She needs to quickly recruit super agents with various specialties to begin the mission and make the world safe once again. The assembled team features several of Mikels' Castle ladies and tough gal/stripper Tura (Faster Pussycat, Kill! Kill! and Astro-Zombies) Satana as Lavella Sumara—munitions expert. Other Doll Squad babes included: Jean London, Sherri Vernon, Leigh Christian, Bret Zeller, Carol Terry and Judy McConnell

In very little time they realize the arch villain is none other than former spy and ex-fiance of Sabrina, Eamon O'Riley (Michael Ansara). He lives in what looks like a fancy, tacky Palm Springs house that is on a heavily guarded island off the coast of Venezuela. His right hand man is none other than my favorite Mikel's supporting sleaze-ball William Bagdad. Herb Robbins also shows up as Munson the hired hit man.

Sit back and enjoy the ride as we learn about secret agents with implants in their necks, vodka that makes anyone who drinks it explode, and the mad plot to send rats infested with bubonic plague to various areas of the world.

We also get a very odd looking Kaleidoscope editing wipe, some superimposed explosions, barely competent martial arts action, over the top gun battles and girls in bikinis. There's very little gore, no nudity (though we do see Tura in her pasties) and some foul language.

# FILMS BY T.V. MIKELS

## CONTINUED

Does it make much sense? Well there's a wild 14-year-old boy playing with his army men kind of logic to it, but no of course it doesn't make much sense. What you get is a very silly, very fun, very cheap sort of P.G. rated drive-in movie. The dialogue is ridiculous, and the acting varies wildly. It's an overly ambitious tacky mess of a film that you should have a great time watching.

The Image DVD presents the film better than I have ever seen it before. Sometimes the colors look very good indeed but there are problems with night scenes that are too dark. The fault is the print, not the transfer. There's a few worthwhile extras on the disc, including a pretty interesting Ted V. Mikels feature-length commentary in which he has a little fun ribbing himself as he watches the film. The closing credit song, by the way, was almost nominated for an Oscar!

### 1. Girl in Gold Boots

The Girl in Gold Boots is my absolute favorite Ted V. Mikels film. It's a fore-runner of Showgirls without the nudity and bloated budget, and was even out before the infamous Beyond the Valley of the Dolls (directed by Russ Meyer and written by Roger Ebert). In Boots, Leslie McRae is a waitress in a coffee shop in the middle of nowhere who dreams of becoming a world famous go-go dancer. Not an actress or model or CEO—a go-go dancer.

When a guy who intends on robbing the café for needed gas money wanders in, he's smitten by the beautiful waitress. Eventually he takes her to Hollywood so she can audition as a go-go dancer in the club (Haunted House Night Club) that his sister works in. Along the way they pick up a guitar totin' hitchhiker with a past named Critter (Jody Daniel) —because they think he has some money and a bit of a triangle develops. The club owner and his henchman

(Bill Bagdad in an unforgettable performance as a slimy bad guy with a twitch) are into drug dealing and prostitution. There's lots of silly dance numbers and way too many third-rate wannabe pop songs that pop up every few minutes. It has impressive location work, memorable dialogue and I find it one of the most irresistible and entertaining low-budget films that Ted V. Mikels has ever made. Do not miss it. The whole thing is rated G and it's a blast.

The Image DVD presents a print that has a lot of flaws, but it's again a good presentation of the film and it looks much better on the DVD than other times I've seen the film. Ted has a feature length commentary that at times is interesting and full of fun trivia about the making of the movie.

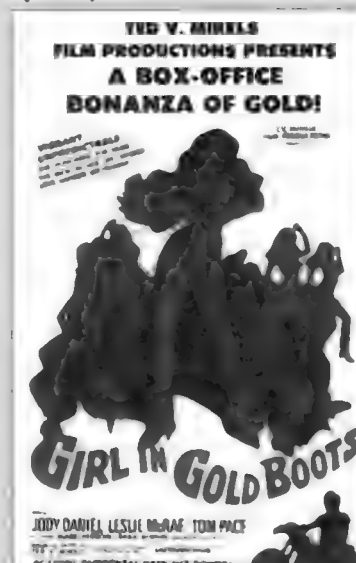
### What about Blood Orgy?

A lot of people consider Blood Orgy of the She-Devils one of Ted's best movies. It isn't, the film has no nudity and very little blood. Moreover, the pace very uneven and long stretches of the film are completely intolerable. Since it is embraced by a lot of low-

budget cult movie fans and many insist it is Ted's best, you might want to make sure you see it. Most of it was filmed in the famed Castle. DVD available from IMAGE.

### Ted's Oddest Film

Ted didn't actually write or direct Up Your Teddy Bear, also known as Mother, but he came up with the title of the film, re-edit-





# FILMS BY T.V. MIKELS

## CONTINUED

ed the film, and marketed and distributed it (Under his Genent Film company) in the early 1970s. If you know who Wally Cox, Victor Buono and the lovely Julie Newmar (Cat Woman on the Batman t.v. series) are, you won't believe they had anything to do with this low budgeted, sleazy sexploitation movie. It's also hard to believe that Quincy Jones did some of the music for the film. Wally (Mr Peepers, Hollywood Squares, voice of Underdog) Cox plays Clyde King, a mild mannered, mother-fixated weirdo who has invented little wooden puppets with which he entertains children at the toy store where he works. Julie Newmar, whose nickname is 'Mother', owns Mother Knows Best Toy Company. Her assistant is the a creepy, infatuated man-child Lyle, who is also called Skippy (played by the 300 plus pound Victor Buono). 'Mother' wants Clyde to work for her company and sends Skippy set up a meeting with Clyde (Cox). During the lunch meeting, Clyde is scolded by 'Mother' (Newmar) and has a flashback of his own overly domineering sadistic mother (who looks like Julie Newmar of course) from his childhood. It scares him and he winds up fleeing the meeting and not signing the contract to work for the toy company. Skippy discovers that Clyde has an obsessive lust for women—though he is so shy to actually do anything about it and is probably still a virgin. 'Mother' and Skippy decide to hire various prostitutes to seduce Clyde so they can get his name on a contract to work for the Mother Toy company. However, something always seems to trigger disturbing flashbacks in Clyde involving his mother abusing him. 'Mother' is very angry at Skippy for failing, so to get back into 'Mother's' good graces the infatuated

ed SKIPPY tells 'Mother' that Clyde has died. Mother insists on going to the funeral. Now Skippy needs to actually kill Clyde.

At one point Skippy, the 300 pound Buono dresses in hooker drag. The production values are poor, the dialogue is atrocious and the film doesn't have a satisfying ending. Buono's appearance is downright creepy and the attempts at slapstick humor (like when Buono tries to squeeze into Clyde's tiny car) are pathetic. There are lines of dialogue that are awkwardly repeated by the actors a few times during the film that add a feeling of either desperation or surrealism to the film—you decide. There are a few brief flashes of nudity—though not Julie Newmar. My jaw definitely dropped several times while viewing this film and, despite surviving thousands of bizarre movies in the past, this one is a very strange odd, sleazy, one-of-a-kind film. Seattle's Something Weird Video has the title available for sale on VHS and DVD-R and if you want to see one of the oddest sexploitation films every made that starred 'name' actors—look no further.

—Christopher J. Jarmick

dents get hands-on experience working with lights and cameras and I teach them what they literally cannot learn in textbooks. I call it my ten-million dollar education. I teach things that they can't learn anywhere else.

**Jarmick: And you are already shooting *The Cauldron: Baptism in Blood*. . .**

MIKELS: You know I haven't decided if we are going to keep the 'Baptism in Blood' part as the title in the film.

**Jarmick: If you have don't have much blood in the film, people might be disappointed, I suppose.**

MIKELS: There is plenty of blood in the film. We were actually working on an effect tonight where blood comes through this skull and drips down. But, what I meant was, that the title might be too sacrilegious.

**Jarmick: Ted, the people who would complain that calling the movie *Baptism in Blood* is blasphemous, probably wouldn't watch the movie no matter what you called it, and if they talked about the title or got upset about the title, then maybe you'd get some free publicity from that.**

MIKELS: Yeah, that's true. They complained like anything about Undertaker and His Pals, and even after I took out most of the medical footage and released it, it was still banned in Boston. It was good for the movie.

**Jarmick: So how many shooting days are you scheduling for *The Cauldron*?**

MIKELS: Twenty-eight shooting days over the course of six weeks. And, we may even do better than

that. When we shot at the gym last week, I actually squeezed two days into one. I'm keeping my shooting days very short. I know that everyone who has ever worked in independent movies doesn't believe it, but I keep my shoots to under 4 hours and absolutely never over 5 hours. I am doing the lighting and the shooting. I don't have to tell a camera man what I want; I just do it. I've taught and trained so many, many cameramen over the years, and I was on the qualifying board in the '60s in the camera unions to get cameramen qualified in order for them to get their cards.

I move very quickly, I light even faster. Just give me one or two people who can understand English and who can reach up to the light head and deal with the spun glass. The only time you run into eighteen-hour days is when people are trying to figure out how to do it and you have too many people on the set.

**Jarmick: Yep, that's what happens on most shoots.**

MIKELS: I don't do that. I walk onto the set, even if I have never been on the set before, I know where the camera needs to go. I put my finger down and say, "The camera goes right here." I hold my hand up to show how high up I want the lens and that never moves on the first set-up. Meanwhile I'm setting up the lights. If I'm not doing it myself. I'm telling them I want a 2k here, or I want a micky or whatever, I tell them what I want. If I want a single spun glass or a double spun glass, and high the light, whether I want it

pinned or flooded. I can light in minutes sets that I have seen experienced crews take hours to light.

**Jarmick: You're saying you have a little experience doing this?**

MIKELS: That's right (he chuckles). There's no replacement for 53 years of doing this.

By my estimate, and it should be accurate, I have done over a million-and-a-half set-ups, camera set-ups since I was a kid. So, guess what? I can look at a room, and in a glance, I know where the camera needs to go.

I don't waste any time. Once I have my shot, I go right-away. Okay, for the next shot the camera goes right here. There is not 30-seconds that goes by after I wrap my shot when I give my gang the next camera set-up.

**Jarmick: I don't get the impression you're a tough taskmaster on the set.**

MIKELS: I'm not. I love it when people say with all my knowledge and experience I am the easiest and most pleasurable that they have ever worked with. Nobody wants to go home at the end of my shoots. They all love the shoots, they can't wait for the next day, the next shoot and none of them can wait for the next picture and they want to be involved. I don't yell at people, I don't embarrass people, I don't belittle people. I work especially hard to praise them and give them a slap on the back for a job well done. I give all the females a hugs and squeeze and all the males a nice warm handshake at the end of every shoot.

**JARMICK: Tell me a little bit about *The Cauldron*. The movie is about an American Idol type television contest, right?**

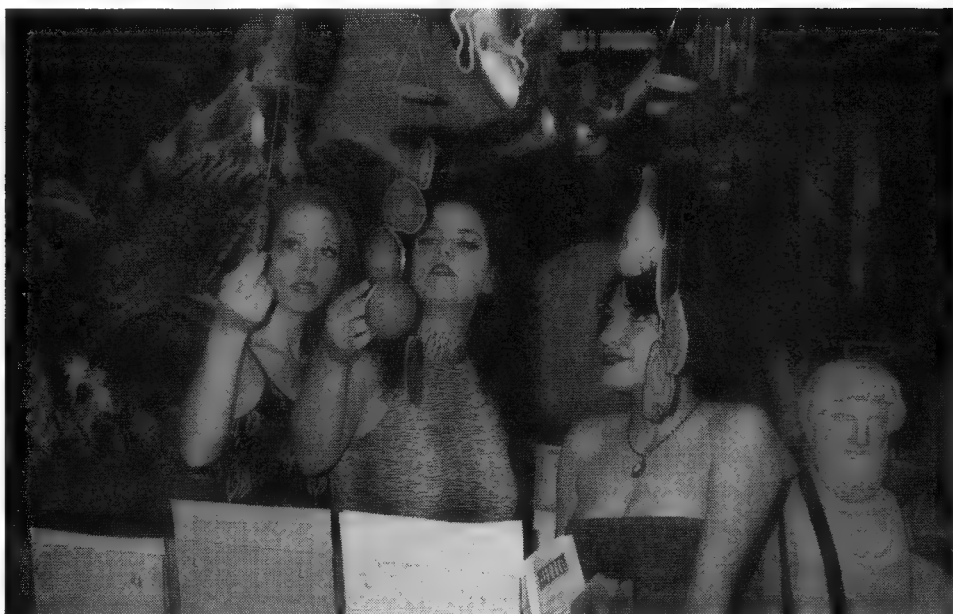
MIKELS: Yes, I have an opening where we are watching the leading lady compete in an American Idol or Star Search kind of show. She is tied into a demonic group to insure her life-long dream of fame and fortune. You can read the synopsis on the website if you like. It is meant actually to be a sequel to *Blood Orgy of the She-Devils* which is one of my better known and better selling films. It had a good run in theaters many years ago.

**JARMICK: The title is very risqué, but the film has very little sex or nudity and almost no gore..**

MIKELS: That's right, there wasn't any nudity or sex in the film. Not that I am against it, but when everyone does it, I don't want to do it. So, I don't have nudity or sex. And gore for the sake of gore doesn't work for me either, so there's minimal gore in there. I like to intrigue people and catch them into a story. Entertain them, keep them hooked.

**Jarmick: Most of your movies are like you've tapped into the 14 and 15 year old boy in yourself and you just go with that kind of flow.**

MIKELS: I never thought of it that way. When I was 12 and was supposed to get that part in the movie, I never forgot it. And I thought, by gosh, that is never going to happen again. In the future I am going to create the movie and put myself in it. And at the time I was just going to put myself in the movie not direct, write, produce, light, edit, and dis-



**Coven Girls shopping at the witchcraft store in the latest TVM film, *The Cauldron*.**

tribute. I was still in my mid teens, 14 or 15 years old and that is what I determined I would do. So, when you asked me earlier when did I really know, I think it was when I was 12 and I was selected to be the young boy starring in a movie with William Powell and Merle Oberon. You really hit something there when you said it is the 14 and 15 and 16 year old boy.

**Jarmick: I think you can watch most of your movies from that perspective. The 14 or 15 year old boy. You can really enjoy them if you do that.**

MIKELS: That is very interesting. When I was still that age I wanted to make, long before it was ever considered possible, I wanted to make movies of *The Flash*...from the comic books and of *Batman* and *Superman* and *Wonderwoman*.

**Jarmick: You must have been inspired by the old serials that come out in the 1940's.**

MIKELS: That's what I mean. I started dreaming about this before those serials came out. I'm thinking back to 1938 or 1939, and when

those serials came out much later. I felt cheated. I thought they were cheating me in my mind's eye because I was the one who should be making those movies.

**Jarmick: And you thought you could do it better, right?**

MIKELS: Yes. Even at fourteen or fifteen-years old (he laughs).

**Jarmick: Your journey has been pretty remarkable. People might think, how does he get so lucky to make all these movies like he does.**

MIKELS: Well that's true, people do sometimes do think how did he get so lucky that he got to make this movie and that movie. I didn't get lucky. It's blood sweat and tears. I bought a light and learned how to use it. I bought a camera and learned how to use it. I bought a movieola and learned how to use it. I bought a pencil and notepad and learned how to write. I put myself through it and learned how to do it.

You know what is funny if I get money I buy a new lens or a new editing deck or a new light. If I get an extra 5 grand I buy another Nagra,



another 12 grand I buy a Beta Cam.. my intention is not to get rich, but it's to make movies and to keep going.

**Jarmick: When you are not working on a movie set it seems like you are very impatient.**

MIKELS: That's true. I get impatient not being able to do what I need to do. That eats on me when I spend time worrying about my bills and paying my credit cards rather than figuring out a new shot or some new dialogue.

**Jarmick: And your obsession must also sometimes be difficult for other people around you.**

MIKELS: You mean Doc Wendy, yes it can be difficult. She's very important to me.

She understands it though. You know it's been seventeen years of hope and promise. Hope and promise for everything. The future always holds that hope and promise and sometimes you know long, long, long times go by and nothing really happens. It's the eternal struggle to keep going, pay all the bills, buy equipment, stay positive. She's just so important to me. I can't possibly give her enough.

**Jarmick: Well, seventeen years together says a lot.**

MIKELS: Yes it does.

**JARMICK: The movies, commercials, seminars, what else are you up to?**

MIKELS: We have built such a magnificent set with coffins and sacrificial tables and roman columns and grave stones for The Caldron, I have an idea to do this thing that I

almost did a few years ago which I call: Ted V. Mikels' Nightmare Theater.

**Jarmick: What's the idea?**

MIKELS: It's to help young filmmakers get their films seen. There's a lot of people who have made films and they can't sell them and can't market them. I can help get them exposure. I have to charge them for it, of course. They can come to my studio, raise themselves up out of the coffin that will be properly lit, or anything else they want to do in the studio. They can actually telecast their movie via satellite so it can be downloaded and seen by anyone with a satellite dish or by anyone with a small t.v. station, which we could arrange.

These people will be able to market their own movie, sell DVDs and cassettes, all through Ted V. Mikels Nightmare Theatre in my studio. Now it would not be mandatory for them to come in and make an appearance. That would cost extra with the plane ticket and staying in a hotel and all that. I would host the shows which is why I could call it Ted V. Mikels Nightmare Theater.

**Jarmick: So do you ever watch other films? Have favorite filmmakers? Did anyone influence what you do?**

MIKELS: People have asked if I have seen this movie or that movie and have asked what do you think of this person's work or that guy's work. What do I care about his work? I make my own movies, I don't care about what someone else does. Sometimes I see things on tele-

vision or on video but not very often. I don't have time. I'm juggling credit card debt, I'm making movies, I'm teaching.

**Jarmick: And do you ever listen to the critics?**

MIKELS: No. Most of them wish they were they making movies and yet have never done what it takes to actually make a movie. I just figure I make the best movie I can with the money I have and if someone doesn't like it, they can lump it. I always had the saying if ten people tell you that you are drunk, then lay down. Well if out of ten people four people say your movies suck, and six people say it's good, you feel good. If seven people like it you are in heaven; if eight people like it, man, you have a winner.

**Jarmick: And you understand that people like your movies in different ways.**

MIKELS: As long as they enjoy them, that's what is important. If they want to put one of my movies on t.v. and make comments about it or make fun of it, I don't care. They are going to say what they're going to say anyway. I'm not going to let it affect me. I just keep on going and make another one.

**Jarmick: Surely, not everything just bounces off of you, though.**

MIKELS: I think in time you learn to let everything bounce. Something may stick in my craw for awhile and I find a way to emotionally, or with whatever bit of intelligence God gave me, to deal with it. So it doesn't get me down. Out of all the hundreds of comments I have gotten on

the last movie, MOTAZ, I mean just incredible things people say... one guy said he didn't like the movie and it was far beneath what he expected from Ted Mikels ... it bothered me for about two nights. But then again when two-hundred people tell you how much they love it, you just accept it. You'd like it to be two-hundred out of two-hundred who like it, but you take what you can get. And maybe I'm kidding myself when I say that one-hundred ninety-nine out of two-hundred love it, maybe that's what they tell me, and when they talk to someone else they say something else. Maybe only half of them like it, I don't know. Meanwhile, I just keep going and there's a fascination to keep doing it. Keep doing other things. Again, what is my alternative. Not to do it?

**Jarmick: A lot of people have seen your movies during the last fifty years.**

MIKELS: You know, my feature films have grossed the equivalent of between a half to three quarters of a billion dollars. But I've not even seen one tenth of one percent of that. It's a crazy business...I love making movies.

**Jarmick: There is nothing better to you than making movies is there?**

MIKELS: Chris, one thing I do want to say is that I have so many people thanking me for inspiring them to get into the movies. They spend their life or all of their adulthood making movies inspired by Ted Mikels and that is a real... well, something that gives me great satisfaction to hear that from people. I am not only talking about the four or five-thousand people that I physically started in the business by giving them jobs in my movies; I am talking about people I have never heard of. People that have seen my movies around the world and have written to me and thanked me for inspiring them to make movies. It really touches me. Somehow this silliness I have done inspires them.

**JARMICK: A grinding machine box and some hamburger meat has inspired thousands.**

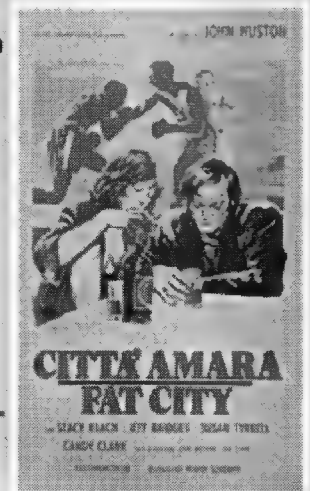
MIKELS (chuckles) We mixed that hamburger meat with sawdust back then, because the meat cost 29 cents a pound, but the sawdust was free. The bones we put in there, the butchers gave me those bones for free. I would tell them I'm making a horror film and they would just give me the bones.

**Jarmick: You love it all.**

MIKELS: Yes, I do LOVE making movies, and I enjoy each and every step of the process. Preparation is essential, and without it,

## The Red House

Somewhere out West, but not where you think, is The Red House Tavern. A place where people who fall through the cracks of life and those who lurk in the shadows for both the right and wrong reasons hang out or pass through.



Red House  
Tavern Tales

tells these stories in a narrative free verse poem form. You'll find four more 'Tales. sprinkled throughout this issue of Brutarian. It is certainly appreciated Dom & company have decided to publish these unique prose poems as they are difficult to label and come in all shapes and sizes. There's a distinct voice to these poems and they are Aloud poems (as in you're allowed to read them out loud). You have my permission to move your lips when you read them. Don't worry what anyone watching you might think, after all if they got nothing better to do then to watch strangers, what do you care? Many of the poems are about tortured souls who don't sleep much at night. If you can relate, well enjoy the company.

Chris Jarmick

Read Red House Tavern Tales 1-4 in Brutarian No. 39

I had to laugh  
when that punk got into my face  
and asked me what the hell I was looking at?  
It was one of those,  
only happens in the movies moments,  
'cept it was really happening to me.  
I said I was lookin' over the fine lady  
he brought into my favorite watering hole  
and if he wanted to do more than just look at her  
for the next couple of weeks, he better step down  
and get the hell outta my face.

He asked me if I was sure about that.  
I asked him if he wanted some proof.  
He thought about that for a moment  
and when he looked away,  
I figured he was either going to swing  
or that was the end of it.

When he bought me a drink  
and apologized for being such a jerk,  
I made sure my wallet was still  
in my front pant's pocket -  
been keeping it there for a long time.

Then he explains he's an actor,  
and he's got a job in some new movie.  
He's in my bar because he's doing research  
and he could use a guy like me.  
A guy like me could help him make sure  
the drunk he was playing would be authentic.

I looked him over. Recognized him.  
Then I said: "You wanna know  
what it's like to enjoy your poison so much,  
you savor the the headaches, the hunger, the sickness the stench,  
the cramps, the shakes, the empty hole  
that you gotta fill up with more poison?"  
"Yeah, that's what I want to know,"  
he said. I smiled.

"I dunno know, asshole," I said.  
"I don't know nobody like that  
'cept in some stupid movie."



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## RED HOUSE TAVERN TALES No. 5

### Here's Lookin' at You

by Christopher J. Jarmick



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you don't have a chance of a smooth production. Since I always have been the director AND the producer, and almost always additionally the writer, cinematographer and the editor, even though I have had Executive Producers to work with, I don't have anyone to please but myself, and I'm very critical of myself and very hard to please.

In Hollywood

and its surrounding areas it became extremely difficult to shoot on the streets without expensive permits, etc. I can't stand anyone telling me that I "have to do this or have to do that." I couldn't stand the city telling me I couldn't film in my own home, my Castle in Glendale without their permits. On my property, I felt I could do whatever I wanted. I really must have total control, and the last word. If I accept a position working for someone else, as I have many times in helping others make their movies, I work hard to do my job to the best of my ability and to give them what they want, even if I don't ask for my name to be put on the credits. I still do that in my studio here in Las Vegas to this day.

**Jarmick: And you'll find the money to make movies.**

MIKELS: The difference between a very expensive and a low budget movie is the amount of money you pay the participants... film costs the same to everybody...

You find people who can handle the technical jobs or who can learn fast and then it comes down to how much you pay your principal people.

When I'm making movies with no money I get an average of two-thousand people who want to work on it. I get audition tapes, and crew résumé's from all over the world. I can't pay anyone, though, so if they live more than a few miles from the studio I can't use them.

**"... the butchers gave me those bones for free. I would tell them I'm making a horror film and they would just give me the bones. "**

If I get some investors for a picture then I can pay people. If I'm paying for the movie myself, I can't afford to pay people. And since time is money, I can't always afford to train someone, either. So I do a lot of things myself. I mean I can light a set very quickly without a lot of fuss and bother.

**Jarmick: You also improvise a lot when you are making a movie, I take it.**

MIKELS: I make decisions on the spot. It's very improvisational. I put the puzzle pieces together later on in the edit room. It's how I work.

**Jarmick: Without a net.**

MIKELS: You only need a net if you intend on falling, I intend to keep entertaining audiences for many years to come.

**Jarmick: Thank you so much for taking the time to talk with me.**

MIKELS: I've enjoyed it. 🐾

You can find out more about Ted, the movie-making seminars he teaches, and how to purchase copies of autographed videos, DVDs and assorted memorabilia by visiting his website at: [www.tedvmikels.com](http://www.tedvmikels.com)

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Christopher J. Jarmick is the co-author of the critically acclaimed mystery suspense novel, *The Glass Cocoon* (with Serena F. Holder) and is a poet who hosts several poetry readings in the Seattle, Washington area. He is also the President of the Washington Chapter of PEN-USA, an international organization of professional writers ([www.penwa.org](http://www.penwa.org)). He's a former television producer with credits that include: *Entertainment Tonight*, *Hard Copy*, PBS documentaries and more. When not writing, watching movies, hanging out at Seattle's *TABLET* newspaper or gardening, he tutors first and second graders so they can become better readers and writers.

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*Part 1 of this interview with Ted V. Mikels can be found in Brutarian No. 39, or on [www.brutarian.com](http://www.brutarian.com)*

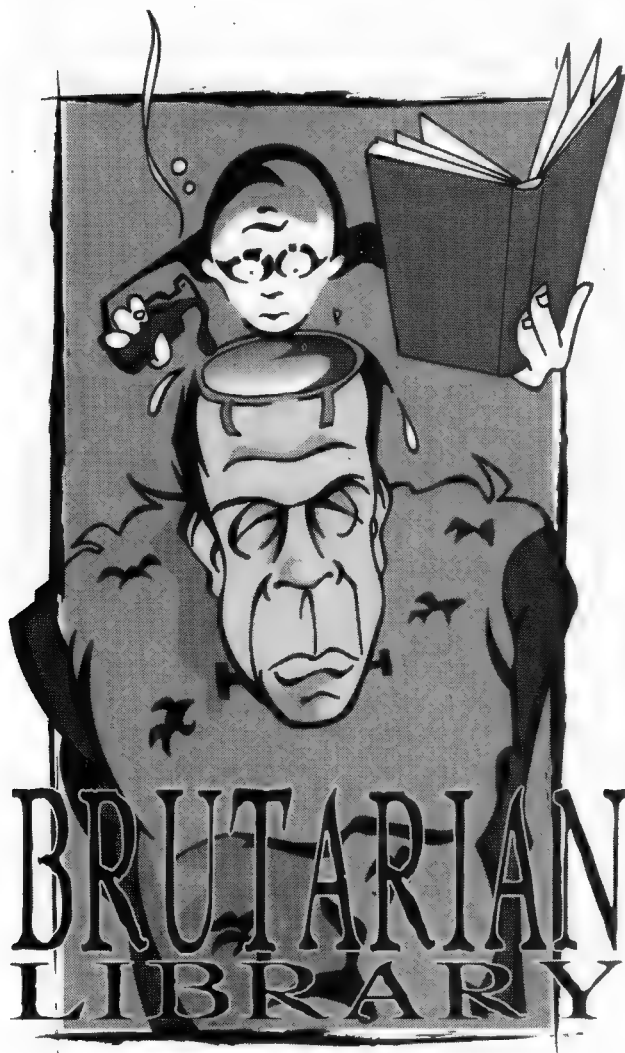


# books

"All the great media adventures of the 20th century have been visual. Television, movies, the Internet, they're all visual mediums and I don't think people have time to sit down and read."

—ED NEEDHAM

*the managing editor of Rolling Stone magazine*



## The Devil's Larder

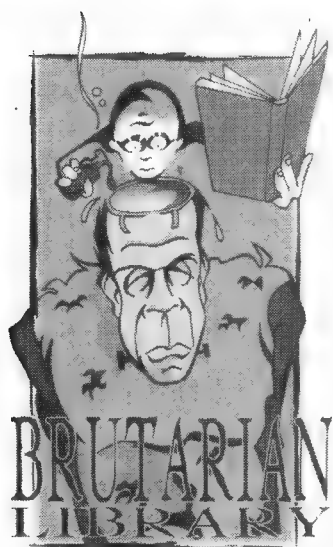
**Jim Crace (2001) Farrar, Straus and Giroux**

Sixty-four short fictions – the last contains only two words: Oh honey – with food as its focus, and jumping-off point. For meditations on sex and death and life; everything but literature and poetry. Because these brief pieces, some of them approaching story, are the art. Highly burnished, unobtrusive prose, that if you listen to closely, sings to you. And contains much wisdom. Here, from an interlude where we find a woman seeking to assuage her grief by pouring a bit of her husband's ashes on her food each day: "You can't eat grief. You have to let the sorrow swallow you." Or this reflection on the overstated properties of champagne: "The drink is rarely equal to its task or reputation. It lets us down. Nothing is that heavenly or transcendent." Are we what we eat? Perhaps, certainly if *The Devil's Larder* tells us anything, it is that what we choose is what we are. And what it tries to do, as in Crace's piece de resistance, an observance about a restaurant serving nothing but ambiance, is to celebrate emptiness, the "that" which is "not," the quiet, in a hustling, bustling, otherwise oversaturated world. Like the finest food, Crace does this – and here we are paraphrasing him so you may get a taste of his delicious diction – by breaking the rules. He seeks to reconcile the Dionysian with the Apollonian, the atavistic with the meditative, the tactile with the intangible, the poetic with the vulgar. It's a short book, a mere one hundred sixty pages or so; still, best taken in small doses as it is quite rich and quickly satisfies.

## Sexual Life of Catherine M

**Catherine Millet (2001) Grove Press**

Ah, zee French. They invented sex, non? Made it exciting and dirty. Gave us the understanding that it was, how you say, acceptable to place the penis in the mouth? To lick the mount of Venus immediately après urinating? To also, God knows what else. Oh, pardonez-moi, c'est vrai, you are understanding what else. There is ze strap-ons and the champagne enemas and the cyber-sex and the Prince Albert, c'est vrai. Now, though, there is a



nouvelle concept. Ici est brillante. Oui, brillante. Whereas, the divine Marquis, in a futile attempt to bore us to death, attempted to catalogue all the possible sexual permutations between male and female, male and male, female and female, then groups of humans and then humans and animals and then, finally, humans and inanimate objects, Catherine Millet has chosen in pursuit of the same goal, to talk and talk and talk endlessly about normal, routine sex. Ici est formidable, oui? It is taking the guilt out of lust and making it, how you say, pedestrian? That is revolutionary. Or at the very least a revolutionary theorist, as she has drained the poetry and romance and savagery and insanity out of the need for reaffirmation. Which, in the end is what copulating is all about. While working, Ms Millet, "plowing ahead like a tank," keeping the great French artist Cezanne in mind, "I owe you the truth in painting and I will tell it to you," she quotes. Bonne, mais Ms. Millet seems to have misunderstood this great joke by this lover of chalk walls. For there is no truth in painting, c'est vrai? How can there be, as it is only pigment smeared on canvas? And so it is with

sex, which is nothing but blessed release. That is if fortune and men's eyes and the cycles of the moon are aligned properly. Millet suffers from migraines. She has never come across "any declared enthusiasts for my farts or feces." Cezanne, was he not staring glassy-eyed at Mont Marte, would say, "Ask and it shall be given to you."

That is what sex, when used properly, as a drug, will do for you. It will fuel and stoke your fantasies and lead you to more. To that which dare not speak its name. Millet by keeping emotions strongly in check through promiscuity, brings us to this end. The end which is our beginning. Which is love. Which is all you need.

## Piercing the Darkness: Undercover with Vampires in America Today

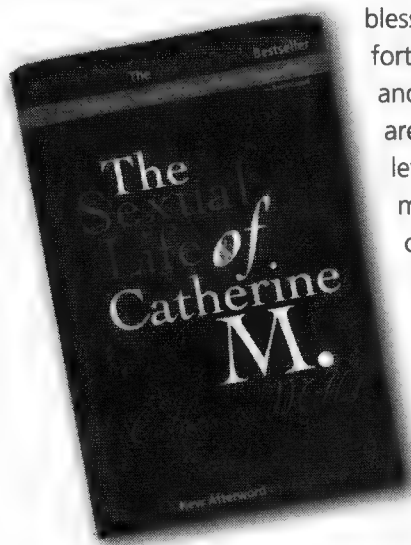
Katherine Ramsland (1999) Harpers

Ramsland's brave, give her that. She walks into situations many of us wouldn't go near with a posse, like the vampire subculture.

Here's how she got interested: In July of 1996 a journalist named Susan Walsh disappeared while investigating a vampire subculture in and around New York City. Rumors flew like bats but Ramsland, using contacts she'd made doing books on Anne Rice and other aspects of vampire culture, wanted to find out for herself so she started interviewing. This soon led her to some deeper, darker connections.

She became interested in the vampire subculture as she sorted out the differences between vampire, vampyre, and goth. Rather than observe from the outside, she decided to jump right in, attend vampire balls, investigate the clubs where the vampires hang out, go to the secret places where they met for darker reasons, and generally become as much one of them as her ethics and reason allowed.

Well-written and well-organized, the book is also sordid in places. It's unavoidable, given where the topic leads, such as the blood fetish escapades, for instance. Whatever it is, though, she reports it all with grace, aplomb, and honesty. She admits to being afraid, or outraged, even as she continues asking questions and tracking down answers. Van Hels-



ing's got nothing on Dr. Ramsland.

She covers the internet, where a vampire presence can mean anything from role players and bored teenage poseurs to emotional leaches and deadly predators. Gee, just like real life.

As she goes deeper into the many aspects of what people consider Vampiric she meets fascinating, compelling, and repellent people. Some are blood fetishists. Some are covert gay suckers of blood and cum. Some parade in clubs dressed to the nines in Victorian velvet and lace. Some lurk in lonely woods, or haunt the sub-levels of the subways, where violence and darkness are just for starters.

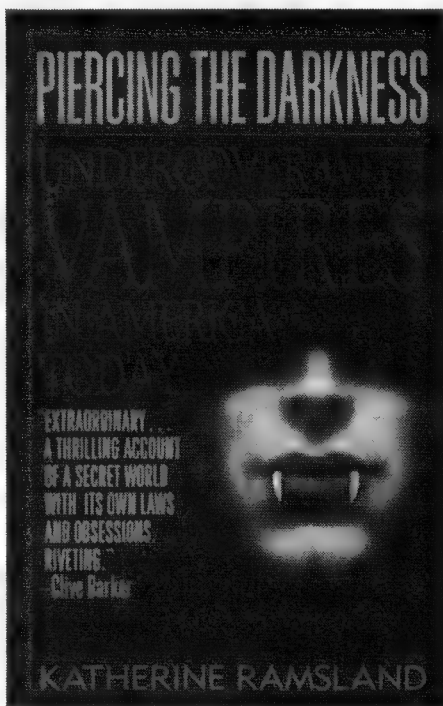
She meets a minister who preys upon unsuspecting people in his off-time. She meets a few who explore the vampire myth by way of cannibalism — they eat small dollops of flesh.

Worst of all she meets Wraith, a sociopathic manipulator, liar, and creep who ends up being perhaps the most chilling monster in this book of grotesques. He is a self-admitted gay seducer, procurer, and murderer, but he's no rap artist. Instead he's got a story to give her, and a ring.

Along with the ring comes a ghost, by the way. One that prompted Ramsland's next book, *Ghost*. It's as eerie and excellent as this one, if not as sordid.

Not all is grime and blood, however. There is much in this book that is light and fun. Many use the vampire role as an inner secret to illuminate their dark places and let them cope from a position of strength with

challenges that would knock most of us down, if not out. Some don the garb, others eschew the attire — old-fashioned, even courtly manners and dress elevate some from mundane jobs such as construction worker, while dental inserts let others have fangs to flash across crowded dance floors.



And yes, a bit of lover nibbling does go on, as Ramsland dutifully observes. She covers vampires in literature, too, and on film. She speaks informatively on why this creature of the darkness, this exploiter of our precious bodily fluids, holds such fascination for so many of us. Her analysis over the course of the book is both systematic and cogent. If it weren't so riveting to read it would pass as one hell of a fine academic work.

The way the vampire has changed from repellent night creature of rot and corruption to a dashing, romantic figure of mystery and allure — from villain to flawed, tortured, and misunderstood hero — is one of the most interesting parts of her analysis. Her conclusion that perhaps, as the vampire is grasped and owned by increasing numbers of people in increasingly different ways, the image's potency is being diluted, makes sense in context with the examples she offers.

Fear must remain or the vampire becomes a hollow figure of fun. Luckily for us, Ramsland finds some fear, even as she confronts a young man so far beyond society's norms that he may indeed be uncanny in some ways. Her confrontation is breathless and chilling.

Lovers of true crime and criminal psychology will enjoy this book, as will anyone interested in vampires, real or imagined. Lovers of interesting anthropology excursions will also enjoy it. It's not only about monsters, but also about ordinary people who have found a way to enhance their lives, have some engaging fun, and still change back to normal before dawn. Which kind are you?

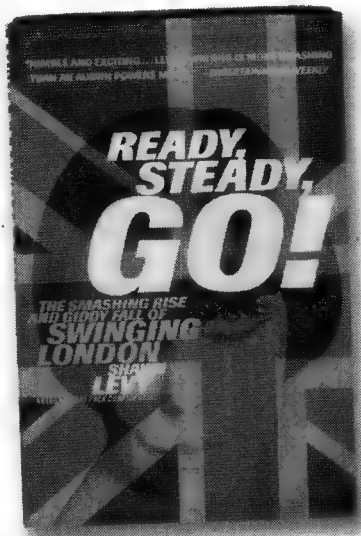
*Piercing the Darkness* is the single best book to read if you're wondering how much of the vampire myth is content to remain in its dusty coffin, and how much appeals to you as a living tradition or way of life. Read it and, whether from fear or excitement, shiver.

*Gene Stewart*

## Ready, Steady, Go! The Smashing Rise and Giddy Fall of Swinging London

**Shawn Levy (2002) Doubleday**

We'll leave off impressing you with our fab quotient by telling you that you shouldn't even bother picking up the book if you don't know how the author came by his title. Instead, we'll open by noting that it has been said in some cineacles that only the mediocre are always at their best. During the '60s in London, however, even the mediocre were dazzling the rest of the world. And London's best – The Beatles and The Stones, the angry young actors and writers, both pop and modern artists – were slowly but surely changing the face of popular culture. Levy believes it was all about making youth culture relevant to "any and every form of expression." It was more than that, of course, but in announcing his agenda, early on, Levy lets himself off the



and, oh yes, someone of actual historical import, Mick Jagger. Questionable choices with the exception of Jagger but Ready, Steady, Go! never asks its readers to take either its conclusions or its judgments too terribly seriously. What we're about here, groovy birds and boys, is fab. As in fabulous. And

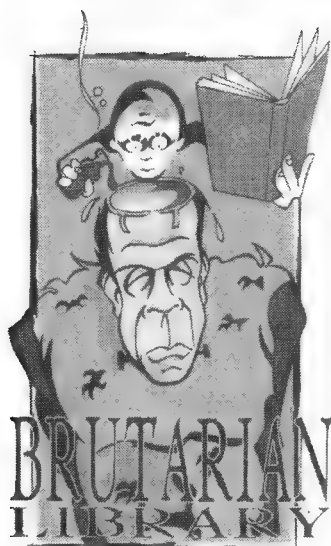
when dealing with that we can't get too far outside the ephemeral, the fashionable, n'est pas? You want serious, go to the back of the book and dig the extensive and scholarly bibliography Mr. Levy

has provided for you. Just to show you how much research he did. And discarded.

## The Ark Baby

**Liz Jensen (1998) Overlook Press**

There is a fertility crisis in England, nobody can get pregnant, and it is possible the British race will die off. People are leaving the country to have families, or adopting monkeys and baboons as surrogate children. Veterinarian Bobby Sullivan, a selfish misogynist, is on the run from possible financial and professional disaster. In a parallel story several generations earlier, some hungry people are preparing a feast of the world's most exotic animals. Then there is the Gentleman Monkey. And the Laudanum Empress. If that sounds confusing, just think of how you'll feel reading the book. Jensen moves between several narratives in this, her second novel. The three narratives feature the modern-day Bobby Sullivan, a 200-year-old circus performer who has very bad luck in love, and Tobias Phelps, a genuine missing link. The stories are tied by animal husbandry, an unromantic little town called Thunder Spit, and the



hook and allows the reader to delight in a history that would seek to put Twiggy and Vidal Sassoon on equal footing with Roy Lichtenstein and Harold Pinter. So sing hosanna in the highest to the simply smashing youngsters who took Italian and French sensibilities – whatever those might be – and welded it to the cupidity and boundless energy of the Britishers' American cousins.

For Levy, history is made by individuals and those most representative of the time were the aforementioned Sassoon, photographer David Bailey, fashion designer Mary Quant, Brian Epstein



theories of Charles Darwin. This is a novel in love with evolution.

Refreshingly, it is also a novel written by a woman unhampered by good taste, as some of the shenanigans the characters get up to (including inter-species sex) would have stopped a less determinedly vulgar author. Very graciously, however, she allows them to pursue their desires without any unneeded authorial manipulations.

She also writes well, even prettily, about very odd things: "I did my best to forget what had happened at the Travelling Fair of Danger and Delight, and I swore Tommy Boggs to secrecy. But the Contortionist began to haunt my dreams, and barely a night passed without some terrible visitation from her or the Man-Eating Wart Hog. In one dream, she was slitting open her belly to reveal writhing tadpoles. In another, Parson Phelps was nailed to the cross, and she and the Wart-hog were lapping up his blood. In another, she was an Angel again, but when she spread her wings, they were no more than dusty, battered old cobwebs."

In a way, *Ark Baby* explores the physical nature of what it means to be human and considers the direction the human race has taken. But it does so, thankfully, in a mess of failed dreams, spilled blood, and sick obsessions. Wherever the human race is going isn't pretty, although where we came from might be even worse. Like Vonnegut's book *Galapagos*, the answer in *Ark Baby* is that the human race might have run its course and that from an evolutionary standpoint,

moving backwards, moving away from some of the traits that we define as human, might be the only way the race can survive.

*Ark Baby* is a darkly humorous novel, sentimental at times, and unsparing in its skewering of human ideals. Human beings, Jensen seems to suggest, might be fooling themselves to think they are anything special, a species set apart from the rest of the animal kingdom. Perhaps the time has come to join the rest of the creatures in the jungle.

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*Steve Wilson*

## **Hypertales & Metafictions**

**Bruce Boston (2003)**  
**Drumm Booklet #34**

Brush away the dirt and mineral crusts, peer deep into the brooch's details: faceted jewels in colors you've never seen. Golden filigree surrounds the stones limning a language no one's ever heard of. You don't understand the meaning of this treasure, but you know its beauty will keep you awake at night.

Bruce Boston's *Hypertales & Metafictions* is a chapbook of six stories, each unique, each dense in imagery, emotion and atmosphere. Some leave you with a sense that you know, perhaps, what they're about. Others are as baffling as they are haunting. Read them repeatedly; read them out loud.

"Length, Breath & Plot" employs the stark condensed form of the Hollywood "pitch" to express the average author's frustration with the common denominator-determining plot and

character. Each of the three times I started reading this I started out thinking, "This is a precious conceit." And every time I got to the line "The sweep second hand we ride by nails and teeth," I found myself once again totally absorbed. Then: "The meaty silence of imagination." That single sentence fragment alone would be worth the price of this chapbook. Any writer who can come up with that is above the kind of insult to readers that follows it, even if the ~~Sale~~ figures from any recent year lends credence to Boston's dismissal by the general reading public.

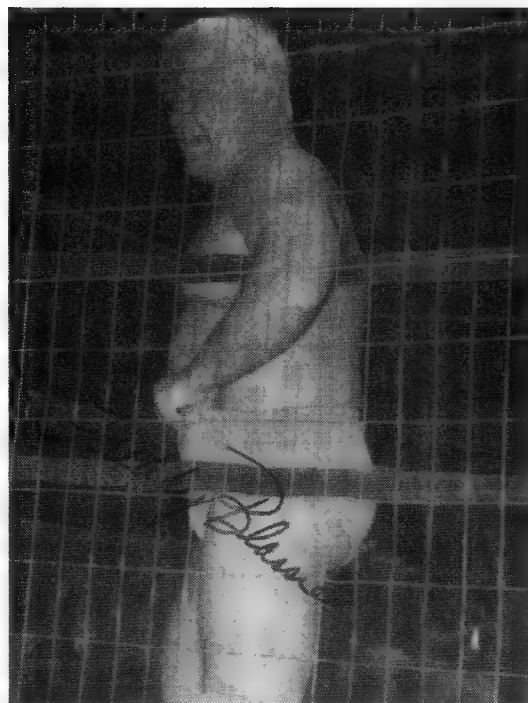
"Burning Man" - post-post-apocalyptic horror-fantasy about the buildup to the final battle between good and evil in America. So dark it's almost indigestible, but then some of the best jewels are the deepest red.

"A Web for Demons": Nightmare? Reality? An abandoned, insomnia-befuddled, middle-aged woman witnesses a murder in the darkness of a foreign city. Will she summon help? Can she? And if she does, will her prosaic rescuers believe her in the face of more plausible explanations? Ah, but one mysterious young man knows of her nightmares and memories, and where her missing husband is... "Carmichael & the City" - A brilliant cad, moving in on an old school friend's woman in an unnamed eastern European city. A queasier trio in an ambience more saturated with decadence you'll find hard to come by. "All the Clocks Are Melting" is the crown jewel of this collection. A crumbling castle shelters a legendary

goddess, guarded by an ancient, capering madman, and along comes the shopworn, possibly insane, knight errant. He's on a quest to save the Lady. But don't think that's what this story is about. If you're a lover of language, read it for that. You'll see it's a strange jewel indeed.

In "Some Concrete Notions About Demons," Boston describes just that, a few tropes concerning demons. This soup is thick with irony and humor, and leaves a wistful, flavorful taste.

If you've never had the pleasure of reading Bruce Boston's work, this is an ideal publication to correct that oversight. Terry Hickman Available at Project Pulp:  
[www.blindside.net/smallpress/](http://www.blindside.net/smallpress/)



## Fred Blassie & Keith Greenberg

**"Listen You Pencil Neck Geeks"**  
(Pocket Star)

Classy Freddie Blassie, AKA "The Hollywood Fashion Plate," "The King Of Men," and several other equally colorful titles, made a very comfortable living insulting and annoying people for over five decades, as arguably professional wrestling's greatest heel or bad guy. Starting out as a wrestler after WW II, he remained active in the ring until the late 70's, when poor health forced him to assume a less active role, as a sequin-suited, cane-toting manager of heel wrestlers. Never much of a worker in the ring, although he was known as a fierce brawler who bit his opponents with his sharpened teeth, Freddie's longevity in the business could be credited to one thing - his incredible gift as a loud motor-mouthed braggart who could improvise tons of vile

insults at the drop of a hat, and continue for seemingly hours on end, as long as he was in front of a microphone. Ironically, the only real competition for Blassie as greatest wrestling heel of all-time was Ed "The Sheik" Farhat, who never spoke a word publicly his entire 50+ year career, such was the effectiveness of his gimmick as the wild man from Saudi Arabia who threw fire and carved his opponents up in the ring. Sadly, both Blassie and Farhat passed away earlier this year, Freddie within a week after the release of his autobiography, "Listen You Pencil Neck Geeks."

Blassie became even more famous after his active wrestling days, recording several ridiculous records (including "Pencil Neck Geek," a mainstay on Dr. Demento's radio show in LA), starring in films (with Andy Kaufman in "My Breakfast With Blassie," and in DC filmmaker Jeff Krulik's short masterpiece "Mr. Blassie Goes To Washington."), and staying on TV as a heel manager. He excelled, above all else, in telling stories and anecdotes about his career and life. . . which is essentially what his autobi-



ography consists of. This book is one of the most hilarious reads you'll ever encounter, even if you don't have a clue about Blassie before picking it up. He talks about his wrestling days (primarily on the West coast), and his tours of Japan (where he became a huge star, much bigger than in his native land - in fact, Fred's obituary made Sports section front page news in Japan), including how he met his wife (a Japanese lady 35 years his junior). He pulls no punches when talking about other wrestlers. . . although, as in the case of many currently active wrestlers who have written books, he only has nice things to say about WWE head honcho Vince McMahon - although it's a bit more palatable, considering Vince honored his late father's (also a wrestling promoter) wishes to always keep Freddie on his payroll. The best part about this book, though, is its tone. It's written (primarily by ghost writer Keith Greenberg) in Fred Blassie's voice, in his wrestling persona/character, and it's like sitting down and having a chat with him. One of the very best books on wrestling ever written.

*John Oliver*

## Manifold Origin

by **Stephen Baxter (2002) DelRey**

An immense "vacuum cleaner" appears without warning in the skies over Africa and scoops up several unsuspecting people, one of them Emma Stoney, the wife of astronaut Reid Malenfant. Then a new moon, much larger than our old familiar ster-

ile rock, and visibly possessing oceans, clouds, weather, and probably vegetation, replaces the Moon. The effects on Earth's tides are devastating, even while the scientific community is galvanized into ecstasies of hope and discord. Reid Malenfant has but one purpose: to get up to the new "moon" and find his wife. While Reid pulls every string, twists every arm he can find to get a launch arranged, Emma is dealing with several different species of primate that she finds on the new moon. The ones who have any kind of speech at all, speak English: a puzzle that's never fully explained to my satisfaction. The ultimate explanation for why all this is happening was a little fuzzy, too. What Baxter does do very well; however, is put the reader in the minds of the other primates. I felt confident from start to finish that the details of their daily lives were accurate so far as anthropologists know now, and it was fascinating and rather impressive. The latter, because the lives of our earliest ancestors were so incredibly difficult that I often end up asking myself how our line survived. And what happens to Reid and Emma is right; no forced contrivance in these fates, or how they meet them. All of the relationships in the book are like that; Baxter has a good grip on human behavior and on motivations.

As a SF writer, whenever I pick up a Big Name Author's latest "big" tome, I approach it with superstitious hope. Surely, I think, there will be magical things in here. This guy treats the "really big": Universe-sized concepts,

hard science fiction, huge sweeping civilizations pursuing galactic aims in a multi-millennial background. Maybe I'll pick up some inkling of how he or she does it. Nearly every time, though, I discover that it's merely mummery and cantrip! That the central "conceit" is balderdash, even though built on a sturdy framework of physics, astronomy, and Newtonian physics. Even more disappointing, these deep thinkers eventually feel compelled to jump from that framework to paddle around in an ocean of hoey. *Manifold Origin* is no exception in the hoey department. Still, all writers of serious sci-fi should study it carefully to see how Baxter marches his story from start to finish. In any event, it's compelling reading, a heady concoction of intriguing information, heartfelt human emotions and novel science.

*Terry Hickman*

## The Da Vinci Code

**Dan Brown (2003) Doubleday**

Finding the Holy Grail Made Easy. Up for a great conspiracy thriller? This one is the best I've encountered in ages. Dan Brown's character Robert Langdon, who last appeared in *Rome in Angels & Demons* struggling against those pesky Illuminati, is in Paris this time when a colleague, none other than a curator at The Louvre, is found murdered in the grand gallery. And not just murdered but nude, posed, and mutilated. Langdon is called in ostensibly to help decipher an apparently encoded message

found scrawled by the victim. He soon realizes he's suspected of the murder when a young woman, the dead curator's niece, Sophi Neveu, shows up and helps him elude police.

From that point on it's a chase as the pair gather clues to help them both prove Langdon's innocence and, far more enticing, perhaps discover what the legendary Holy Grail is and where it might be found. Their skills compliment each other wonderfully well to let them solve puzzles and work their way through a maze of historical and esoteric skullduggery.

Brown weaves in the Priory of Sion, a secret organization that founded the Knights Templar; Opus Dei, a secretive fundamentalist Catholic sect; many amazing and appalling facts about Christianity; even Leonardo Da Vinci's paintings and inventions. Built on research, the book is comprised of 105 small chapters. In each lies at least one surprising revelation and a twist. Brown keeps up the pace expertly as he doles out his treasure trove of unsettling, troubling, and ultimately revealing secrets drawn from history and symbolism. Tiny quibble — Brown will shamelessly use the conventions of the thriller to move things along, from having

his protagonist look in a mirror to give the reader a glimpse, to off-the-cuff cliffhangers. This isn't a bad thing, though, and never decays to huggemugger. It is cognizant use of the form and Brown is at the top of his.

His explanations of some of the symbols and icons of everyday life range from delightfully catty to downright jaw-dropping. Disney's cartoons are propaganda for the Goddess cult? The Vatican is founded on lies and deceptions? Da Vinci's painting The Mona Lisa, (the one in The Louvre), portrays WHO?

Aside: I've been to the Louvre and was surprised when I started crying as I gazed at the Mona Lisa. I had no idea what came over me, not being that type ordinarily. Yet there it was, and cry I did. Emotional impact like a herd of elephants slammed me and all I could do is react incoherently for a few moments. This book helps me understand some of what was going on there, and some of why that painting is considered so great. And The Da Vinci Code is full of explanations and revelations like this.

Most fun you'll have all year is reading this book. It's a deserved best-seller and the many word-of-mouth discussions are proof that Dan Brown has hit the mark squarely with this one. Best use of this material I know of, and done with aplomb.

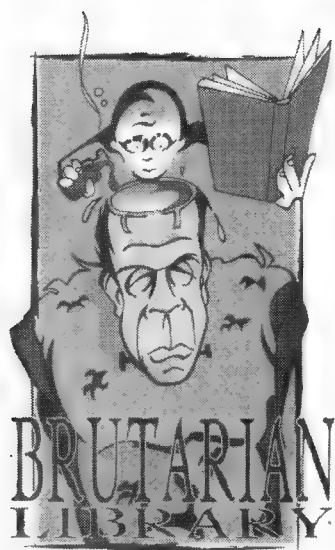
And yes, you do learn what the Holy Grail is, and where.

*Gene Stewart*

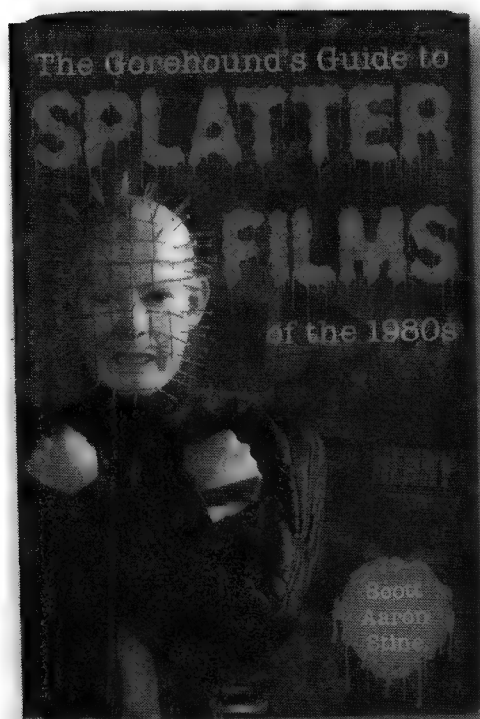
## The Gorehound's Guide to Splatter Films of the 1980s

**Scott Aaron Stine (2003) McFarland & Company**

Ah, the 80s! They truly were the golden age of splatter. The success of mainstream horror films like The Exorcist (1973) and The Omen (1976) proved that audiences would pay to see explicit depictions of grue while the emerging popularity of the video player showed that you could find an audience for any ole thing, even something as depraved as Ferocious Cannibals (1981). So despite the emergence of the critically reviled slasher film from splatter's womb, the 80s found genre filmmakers wracking their damaged brains to find new and inventive ways to shock and amaze us. Most of the time, as with anything else, these disturbed auteurs failed but ask







yourself: isn't "failure" an oxymoron when you're talking about throat slitting, gratuitous nudity and gut munching? Are aesthetics relevant when addressing the good and bad of Carnage or Cannibal Hookers or Christmas Evil, to name just a few Cs? Are we really willing to assess the performance of the actor assaying the title role in Lucker the Necrophagous or Goremet -Zombie Chef from Hell? No, of course not, do you want to be laughed out of the Academy?

Well then, let us give thanks to God on the highest for trash fiend expert, Scott Aaron Stine, and his continued intriguing efforts to separate the wheat from the chaff, first with his Guide to 60s and 70s splatter and now with this, the second volume in what promises to be a continuing

series. The author doesn't take any of this too terribly seriously as most of these films are, well, chaff, and that's what makes this compendium so irresistibly low. So deliciously louche. One just sits in the dark touching oneself in a sinful manner while watching a film like Nekromantik, yes? One doesn't talk or write about it. Much less attempt to examine it. Stine does, and he's right there laughing with you while making his case. At times, Stine's reach exceeds his grasp - William Lustig's Maniac (1980) is indefensible, Dr. Butcher, MD but not Evil Dead an entertaining gorefest - but generally speaking he's a perceptive critic and like the best critics, he tells us what we know to be true and, more importantly, argues effectively, and often convincingly, about that for which you may be undecided.

## Starship Titanic

**Terry Jones(1998) Ballantine**

Normally, video games get their ideas from books, movies, TV, other games, etc. All well and good, but suppose you got Monty Python and the late Douglas Adams involved? Right, who really knows what might happen? Based off a small reference in Life, The Universe, And Everything, Douglas Adams set out to compose a video game named Starship Titanic similar to his text-only adventure game version of The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy (which is an amazingly fun game). What is unique about these games is that the player

actually gets to type his own dialogue, i.e. it's truly interactive. (By the way, if you have Java, check out [www.douglasadams.com/creations/infocomjava.html](http://www.douglasadams.com/creations/infocomjava.html), and start by turning on the light.)

Sadly, Douglas Adams didn't have enough time to write a book and do the CD-ROM game at the same time. And, of course, the publishers refused to publish the book unless it was released with the game. So Adams had to find someone else to write the book - and that's when Terry Jones wandered into the picture. He accepted the job on one condition: he could compose it in the nude.

"Arguable the greatest collaboration in the whole history of comedy," I found this book to be very amusing, although lacking that magic touch Adams himself had. (For example, the subtle quantum-mechanical science was lacking somewhat, although SMEF, Spontaneous Massive Existence Failure, is a great concept.) Nevertheless, this epic story of interstellar corruption is a delightful change of pace from more traditional literature - like Playboy, The Iliad, and Everything You Ever Could Possible Want To Know About Extremely Pointless Things You Already Probably Know Too Much About.

In short, anyone who liked The Guide should enjoy the sex scenes, battles, murders, lies, affairs, and other human-centered topics of this novel. Anyone who has not read The Guide should read that first, and then give Starship Titanic a chance. Oh, and did I mention that there is a talking bomb?

*Scott Stewart*

## Such a Pretty Pile!

**The following reviews by Peter Huston in no way reflect the publisher's views. Well, maybe they do, unless you're looking to sue. Additionally, due to the subject nature of these books, not all are found on amazon.com; hence, there are few pictures in this section of the brutarian library. Matters not; because the reviews are scintillating by themselves. Buck up, be a man (woman, crossdresser, whatever), and don't cry because there aren't many pictures to hold your gnat-like attention span. What follows is important.**

*Editor*

In front of me lies a great big pile of books from Loompanics Unlimited and Paladin Press—two companies sometimes described as “America’s most notorious publishers.” Being a bit notorious myself, well, hoo! hoo! giggle! cackle! I feel like a kid on Christmas.

It's been years since I've seen a similar pile of brand-spanking new books, and, during that time, the so-called alternative press has been under siege. First there was something called “the Hit Man suit.” This happened when someone purchased a How-to-be-a-Hit-Man manual from Paladin and went into business, killing three people for a fee. (To the best of anyone's knowledge, since its publication in 1983, thousands of others somehow managed to buy the same book without being inspired to kill anyone.) Although both the clumsy killer and his employer were soon caught and convicted, (it wasn't a very good book, it seems) the victims' relatives sued the publisher. As the suit made its way through the courts, many watched attentively. Could the publishers of so-called “dangerous books” be held liable for acts committed by their readers? If

so, what about producers of “dangerous fiction” in both print or electronic form?

Frustratingly, no one learned as the suit reached what was perhaps the worst possible verdict. Paladin, upon advice of their insurance company, accepted an out-of-court settlement with cash given to the victims' relatives. Liability was never determined one way or the other, yet a precedent was set that one could make money under some cases by suing such publishers.

This incident, combined with some new laws, sent a shiver through the industry. These laws made it a serious act to provide criminals with information or training that enabled them to commit crimes, if such criminals did commit crimes. These laws did not specify whether or not book publishers or sellers were exempt.

The overall result was great changes in the Paladin and Loompanics catalog, including the dropping by both publishers of many titles on subjects such as assassination and bomb-building.

Thus I find myself with a comparatively mundane pile compared to what I might have found ten years ago.

### **So what do we have and what might we learn?**

First, I notice that both companies are releasing books under new names or branching out.

## **Deep Inside the Underground Economy –**

**How Millions of Americans are Practicing Free Enterprise in an Unfree Society**

**by Adam Cash**

The book is from something called “Breakout Productions.” The folks at Loompanics tell me that Breakout Productions is not Loompanics,



but instead a new independent company started by Mike Hoy, the founder and primary owner of Loompanics. So far, it seems to be publishing primarily reprints of some Loompanics titles, but, their employees tell me, it's "the more mainstream ones."

According to the folks at Loompanics, *Deep Inside the Underground Economy* is a combination and reworking of three Loompanics titles: *Guerrilla Capitalism*, *Getting Started in the Underground Economy*, and *How to do Business off the Books*, all by Adam Cash. Breakout Press also has reissued, among other works, Claire Wolfe's *101 Things to do 'til the Revolution*—Ideas and Resources for self-liberation, monkey wrenching and preparedness—a 1996 classic that, to the best of my knowledge, never went out of print.

I asked the Loompanics people why they were reissuing their own books using a separate company with a new name and was told that Mike Hoy, Loompanics founder and President, "always dreamed of doing this and it seemed like a good time to do it." They specifically denied that liability in the wake of the Hit Man suit was an issue, but it still seems a bit odd.

Paladin, in turn, has released a book entitled:

## **Aluminum Foil Deflector Beanie —**

**Practical Mind Control Protection for Paranoids, by Lyle Zapato**

A goofy-looking, pseudo-New Age

book intended as satire, under the imprint "Outer Limits Press." As this company is described as a "division of Paladin Press," it seems safe to say that the new name is just a marketing tool. Nevertheless, these days Paladin Press is being much more open about their link with Sycamore Island Books (their pre-existing division that published mainstream books that they felt would not fit in the Paladin line) and they have also branched out by acquiring Flying Machine Press, a company that specializes in detailed texts about World War One aviation subjects. (Just for the record, Paladin Features, a company that produces adult films, is unrelated to the publishing company, and the publishing company has long produced how-to videos and documentaries on subjects similar to their books. Also unrelated is Paladium, the role playing games company.)

So the industry is changing. But have these companies become completely lame and neutered?

Apparently not, judging by what is undoubtedly the most controversial work in the pile,

## **Theater of Hell —Dr. Lung's Complete Guide to Torture**

**HaHa Lung and Christopher B. Prowant**

My immediate reaction was "Why would anyone publish this shit?" In fact, made a quick decision not to read it. After all, despite being anti-censorship, I see no benefit to society for an overly detailed guide on torture techniques, past and present. But

then I just had to take a peek, I mean there was a torture manual, of all things, on my dining room table for goodness sakes. How could I ignore that? Then I had to take another peek. Soon I found myself reading and had made it through a large portion of the book, until finally I opted to give in and review the damn thing.

HaHa Lung is the pen-name of the author of several gruesome publications. This one follows the pattern of two of his Paladin titles that I've read, *Strangulation* (1995), which claims to cover the Indian Thuggee cult and *Assassin* (1997), which claims to be about the medieval Islamic cult of Assassins. Lung's books are characterized by poor scholarly quality but an obsessive attention to the gruesome details of how the historical persons under discussion committed, or could have committed, various killings, maimings or tortures, to the point of clearly providing information of the sort someone would need to repeat the acts in an effective, if not necessarily entirely historically accurate, manner.

For instance, although this book is footnoted (a very good thing for all books to be) Lung found one fact on ancient Roman atrocities against the early Christians in the *Reader's Digest*. Elsewhere he states that the Moravian Brotherhood, a fourteenth century Christian sect, executed prisoners by tickling them to death, and cites a book titled *More Fun Facts* as his source. (A scholar would have looked beyond these second hand sources to a more authoritative source.) There were places where I had quibbles over

his descriptions of hypnosis or some details of Chinese history among other subjects. Thus, I would be very careful about considering any of the facts about torture, past and present, in this book, to be definitive or certain and cannot imagine scholars will pay it much attention.

So has Loompanics published a new "how-to" manual on torture? If so, was this a truly horrible act?

Addressing the first question, the attention to detail, including explicit diagrams of torture techniques and a discussion of when and how to apply them for the most suffering, makes it clear that this work could be used for this purpose. Obviously, a reader prone to torture people could easily pick up many points and tips from this book. But the author includes a forward stating that this was not his intent. Instead, he lists the sorts of people who could be at risk of torture and, it is argued, might benefit from reading this work. It lists foreign travelers and federal agents as two examples among many. Bizarrely, the author also states that he hopes criminals will read what he's written, explaining that (they) "at any given time can find themselves at the mercy of a displeased or suspicious employer or in the hands

of an equally unscrupulous competitor, will find this book's vivid depictions of the methodical dissection and destruction of the human mind and body incentive for changing operations." (Hmmm . . . if we follow this logic to its conclusion, it seems that someone should be able to obtain a government grant to instruct prison inmates in the finer points of torture as it is in the public's best interests that they know such things.)

It's interesting to contrast this rather shallow claim to social responsibility with the days long ago when Loom-

panics published *Physical Interrogation Techniques*, openly advertised it as a how-to manual on torture, and then bragged that several printers had refused to print the book before they found one who would.

On the other hand, one can argue that if someone is sick enough to wish to torture someone, they are also sick enough to invent their own methods. Furthermore, if one really wishes to learn a great deal about torture techniques, all one has to do is to study histories of subjects such as the inquisition and the witch-hunts and read Amnesty International reports. In fact, that appears to be largely what Lung has done with this book. He's just put all the gruesome details together in one place.

So with a retch, a vomit, and a strange lingering worry about how many people read the Amnesty International newsletter for entertainment purposes – in a manner similar to those pedophiles who beat off to children's underwear ads—I move on. What a sick species we humans are indeed.

Fortunately I soon find something full of hope and idealism.

## **Speak Up, Speak Out and Be Heard How to Protest and Make It Count"**

**Jeremy Holcomb**

This is a surprisingly well done guide for protesting for social change. Like most people out there, I've done some protesting in my time. It always seemed simple enough. Just listen around, find out where the rally for your favorite cause is, and then show up, right? Hardly. Someone has to plan these things, defining causes, goals, methods, logistics and networking to create something both workable and effective. This work describes how to organize, but also contains information of value to individual protesters. For instance,

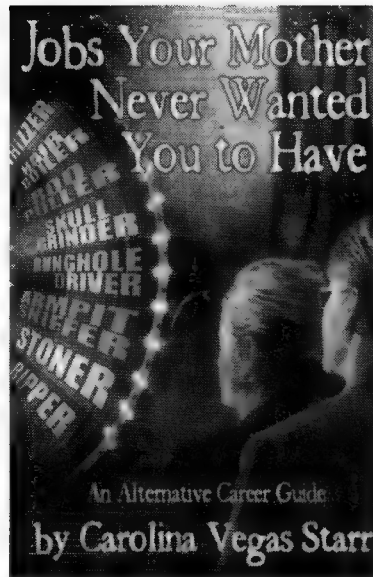




what to bring to a protest, how to behave and what to do if arrested, are all fully covered. The work focuses on legal protests (such as marches) or socially acceptable ones (such as blockades). It does not cover subjects such as tree-spiking or monkey-wrenching. As such protests are often all it takes to make a real change, especially over the long run, Holcomb has written a valuable book that should be of benefit to activists and want-to-be activists for some time.

But what if you can't find a cause? Well, according to Philip D. Harvey in his *Government Creep —What the Government Is Doing That You Don't Know About*, you might want to work to keep government off our backs. A well-done Libertarian tract, this work demonstrates through fictional vignettes, how government policies often work to keep the little man down. Okay, granted, there are a lot of stupid government laws and regulations. Many backfire. Many should be repealed. On the other hand, I've spent too much time over the years, working at minimum wage or on unemployment to advocate for the end to such things, even if I am willing to admit that they hurt small businessmen. Not a bad book, but many of its arguments are of the sort that it will most likely only entertained by those already holding Libertarian views.

Those who are not already entrepreneurs might benefit from reading...



## **Jobs your Mother Never Wanted You To Have –**

**An Alternative Career Guide**

**Carolina Vegas Starr**

The above describes many off-beat jobs and explains how to obtain and be qualified for them. Many of these, such as "Fingerer," "Flamer," and "Odd Shoe Examiner" were obviously chosen just for the oddness of their names and are only described in a cursory way. (For the record, a fingerer is one kind of shoe-repair person, a "flamer" singes excess threads from new shoes during construction, and an "odd shoe examiner" performs one step in the quality control process for new shoes.) Starr spends more time, and often several pages each, on the stranger, often-illegal jobs such as pimp, adult-film actor or actress, sperm or egg donor, and drug dealer. In short, this is an interesting and entertaining read that just might provide someone considering a career

change with some useful information. If nothing else, it will cause them to think outside the box. Still, it's far from complete, and I just have to say that all three of the oddest jobs that I've heard of are not mentioned. )First,

## **Missing Ends**

*Dolores Stewart*

*Walking to the post office:*

This spring-thin squirrel  
clutches on aopen Skippy jar,  
slowly, precariously  
climbs the stockade fence.  
He dies of deadly slivers  
or feasts in nest.  
I never know.

*Driving by:*

What of this mangy yellow dog  
stumbling across the airport field?  
Going home  
or lost and dying.

*In the supermarket:*

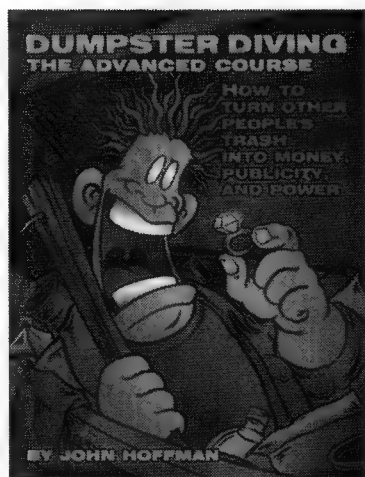
"Can you help me?"  
the voice of a retarded  
half-grown boy.  
"Where are the pacifiers?"  
For his younger brother,  
a perfect baby,  
or for himself in need.

*Reading in bed:*

"A high-velocity bullet  
travels faster than sound."  
It strikes you,  
or you hear it.

A flutter in my heart.  
Nothing to worry about,  
or not.

there was a “debrider” who scrapes the burnt areas of flesh from burn victims with a wire brush in a hospital setting. Second, were the people who actually force-feed geese to produce the delicacy “foie gras.” The third was an airport falconer who handled the predatory birds who drive pigeons away from a large municipal airport.) So the work is far from complete, but then again, how could it ever not be? It’s still useful and fun.



## **Dumpster Diving or Trashing the System?** **Dumpster Diving – The Advanced Course** How to Turn Other People's Trash Into Money, Publicity and Power

**John Hoffman**

Believe it or not, I’m writing this on an under-powered laptop that I got for free. My TV cost twenty-five dollars and my VCR thirty-five dollars, both second-hand. Still, my biggest problem is clutter and, because no one I know wants it, I’m thinking of throwing large piles of perfectly good stuff into the trash just to clean and simplify my life. It doesn’t help that I just acquired 80 vinyl albums for \$10.00, and haven’t sorted them, so they sit in the middle of my writing room. America, like me, is a land with just too much stuff. It’s tragic, but there is a good side for those who learn to work with the situation.

In 1993, spotting an obvious need, John Hoffman wrote *The Art & Science of Dumpster Diving*, an immediate cult-classic on how to obtain wealth and adventure by digging through other people’s trash. Now, almost ten years later, Hoffman has written a sequel. For better or worse, however, the first book was just so well-done and complete that there seems to be little left to say on the subject.

Not that hard-core dumpster-divers won’t learn from this book. They will. For instance, to some, the information in Chapter Eight—Industrial Diving—will more than enable them to recover the costs of this book. Here, we learn about a man who has made a viable business out of what he euphemistically calls, “industrial recycling.” In

other words, he digs through the trash at corporations, large stores and government offices, obtaining goods and materials suitable for salvage, making thousands in profit. Told first hand by a guest author identified as “Mark,” the chapter is not just an inspiration, but like this book itself, a solid commentary on our incredibly wasteful society.

Other sections address both the biggest criticism of the first book — locked dumpsters (Hint! — In many areas, several dumpsters share a common lock and key. That’s how the garbage men get them open.) but also

how technology has changed the market for salvaged goods (Can you say “eBay”? Thanks, I knew you could!).

For better or worse though, there’s really not that much more on the title-subject. Oh, bits and pieces, of course, a tip or elaboration, here and there, but the bulk of the book is filler having little to do with the title.

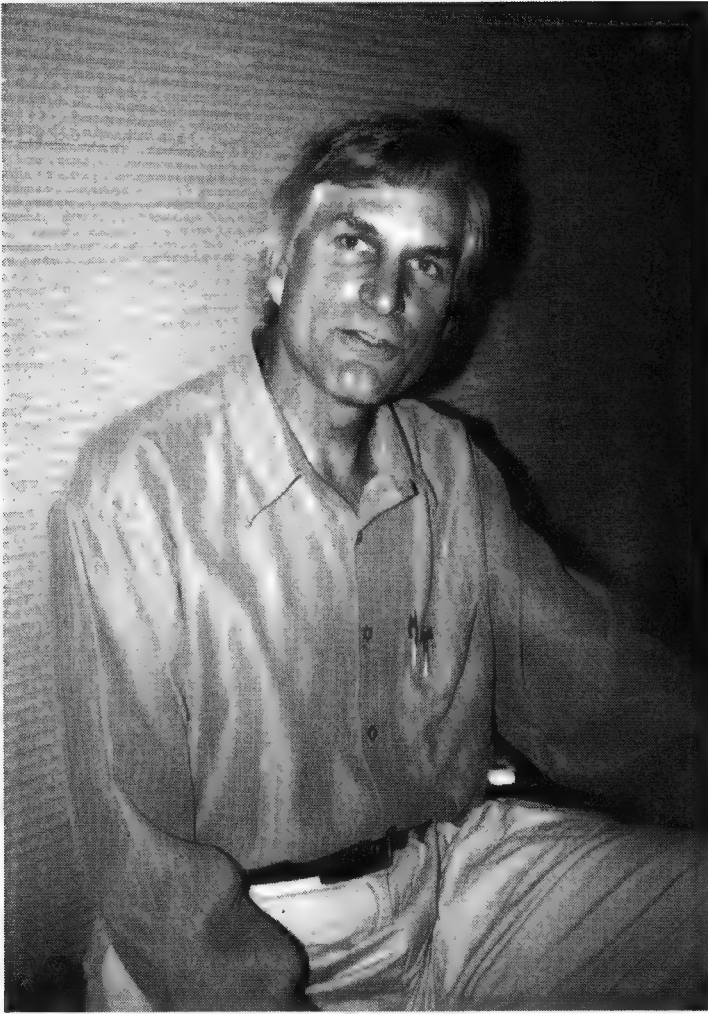
The upside is that it’s entertaining filler. Hoffman tells many stories about his past ten years as an anti-corporate/anti-WTO political activist in Seattle and North Dakota, as well as other episodes in his life. “Don’t just dig through society’s trash,” he seems to say. “Clean up society itself — and if some discarded, embarrassing information acquired in a dumpster somewhere should give you some leverage to embarrass those who deserve it, well, that’s karma!”

Which is a fine message, and the stories are well-told, entertaining and inspiring, but readers should be forewarned that this is the bulk of the content. When I first received this work, before I had a deadline for this review, I used it for throne material, leaving it in the bathroom, picking pages at random and reading in no real order. An unflattering fate, but it made for great bathroom reading.

In short, a fun-read, but information light compared to the original.

*Peter Huston*

Now, as a good Brutarian, go find a good book and read it.



## AN INTERVIEW WITH

jayme lynn blaschke

# David Drake

**A full-time writer since 1981, David Drake made a name for himself with his Hammer's Slammers series of military science-fiction stories based in part on his experiences in the Army during the Vietnam War. Not content being pigeonholed, he has authored or co-authored fifty-four books and edited or co-edited another thirty or so spanning the gamut from Lovcraftian horror to epic fantasy, including the wildly popular Lord of the Isles and ensuing books in the series. He's also written more than a hundred short stories and become one of the most popular genre authors working today. He lives with his wife, Jo, in North Carolina.**

**JLB: You have two novels with S.M. Stirling, *Conqueror and Warlord*, that have recently come out, a collection, *Grimmer Than Hell*, and two new novels, *The Far Side of Heaven* and *Goddess of the Ice Realm* scheduled for publication later this year. 2003 seems to be shaping up as the Year of David Drake.**

DD: Well, that's a pretty standard year for me at this point. Part of it is Tor bringing out *Goddess of the Ice Realm* in September. They've had it for a year. Baen is bringing out *The Far Side of Heaven* in October, and I haven't quite finished writing it yet. Part of what you're seeing is just part of the way different publishers schedule different things.

You know, I've been writing professionally since 1966, I have a lot of stuff. A lot of it is reprintable, because I tend not to write period-oriented stories. Something I write is probably going to be as publishable in 1999 as it was in 1979. That means stuff does tend to come out. The longer I write, the more of it is out there to come out. Yes, I am prolific, but that isn't entirely what's happening.

**JLB: *Goddess of the Ice Realm* is the fifth in your Isles series— what are the challenges inherent in writing epic, Tolkienesque fantasy?**

DD: They're long. That's not a flip statement. They're long. The genre requires long books, and I'm not going to complain about this. That's what the job requires, and I'll do it, but my ideal writing length is about 30,000 words. I'm really, ideally suited to be a novella writer, but there's no market for that. Writing a 200,000-word novel, for me, means writing four 50,000-word novels and interlinking them very carefully. I'm just more comfortable at shorter lengths. For whatever commercial reasons, I will suit my work to the marketplace, because I'm in the marketplace, and it will win.

**JLB: How about the difficulties of writing in a series format?**

DD: Oh, the difficulty is continuity problems. You know, if an event occurred 12 years ago in book one, it's embarrassing that it occurred 10 years ago in book two. And I've done that. That's sort of a minor thing.

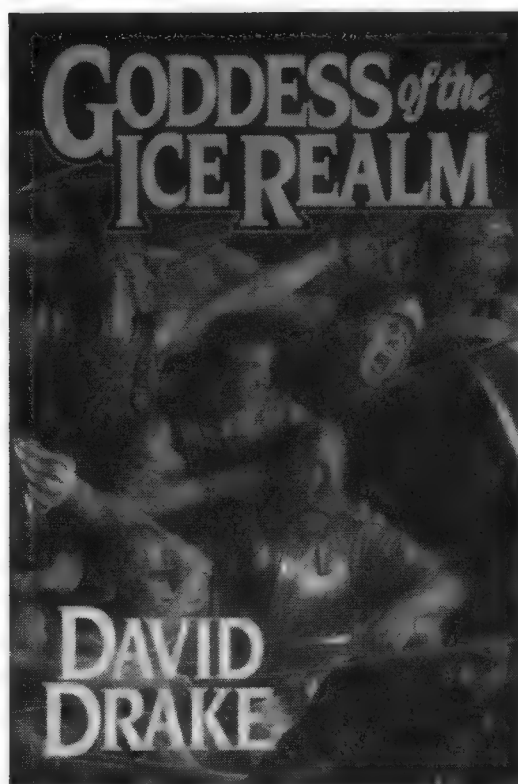
A bigger problem is that each book, each story, has to have a beginning, a middle and an end. Somebody who has never read anything of mine before should be able to

pick up book three in a series, read it, and not know there was a book one and book two. He may like or dislike it, but he'll like or dislike it as a complete novel. That takes work, but, I've been writing the Hammer's Slammers series over a period of 30 years. There are 20-odd pieces in it, because basically it's a short story series, and I've been dealing with the same problems with that from the early 70s. So it's not something I'm unfamiliar with.

I personally consider writing books that are not self-standing to be bad craftsmanship. I won't say bad art, because I don't talk about art, but I do know something about craft. It's a solvable problem. These are problems that are soluble.

**JLB: So what are the advantages of writing in a series format?**

DD: Well, if people like the series they will buy more of them. They will go back and buy the earlier ones if they like the later ones, and that's one of the reasons that I do have so many books in print now. Because people like the new ones, and they go back and they like the old ones as well.





**JLB: The Far Side of Heaven is your new novel coming out in October. What appeal does space opera hold for you?**

DD: Oh, I love it! I love Tolkien also—I'm writing things that I love!

**JLB: So why do you think space opera fell out of favor for a while?**

DD: Actually, one of the problems is that Star Wars is classic space opera. Not the best, but by no means the worst, either. One of the results of that was in order to write in that genre, you were competing with media tie-ins. That's kind of a problem. I don't think space opera, per se, ever fell out of favor. You had Star Wars novels. You had Star Trek novels all along. That's space opera. But the immediate tie-ins—because there's so much larger TV and movie audiences than reading audiences—they tended to swamp the non-media space opera.

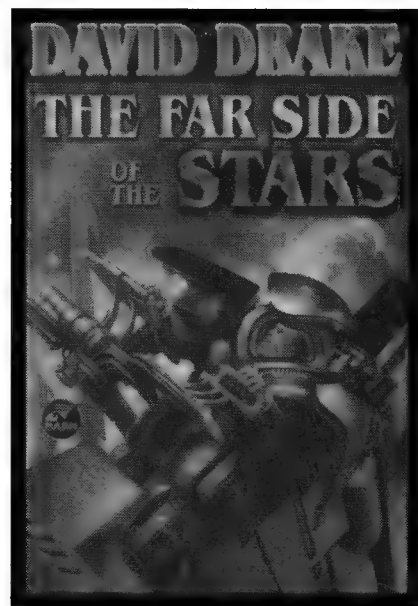
I don't think the genre ever fell out of favor. It's just that it got kind of lost in the media tie-ins. David Weber's been consistently hitting the New York Times' bestseller list with his Honor Harrington space operas. I'm doing them because I like to do them. I had done space operas before I started doing this series, and I've done a lot of military SF. I make a distinction between space opera and military SF, but I write both.

**JLB: What do you get out of writing fantasy as opposed to science fiction?**

DD: I like them both. I read them both. I have always read them both. The reason I'm alternating them the way I'm doing is to keep from going nuts. I did two Isles fantasies back to back, and they're good books, but it felt as though I was writing a single, 400,000-word novel. Having had that experience, I'm making sure I write a different sort of novel each time. The main thing I get out of each is that it's different from the last thing I did, and this is not a small thing for a professional writer who keeps working most of the time.

**JLB: Do you feel you can tackle different subject matter better in different genres?**

DD: No. I cannot think of a plot that I could have used in



one and couldn't use in the other. Probably the most striking example is when I did the Northworld series and used the Elder Edda—the actual Norse mythological poems are the basis of three space opera novels. It would've been a natural for fantasy use, but it worked extremely well as space opera.

Similarly, I did the Odyssey as space opera. I did the Argonautica as space opera. In both cases, obviously, I could have done those as fantasy as easily. The whole Isles series could easily be done as space opera or even hard SF. I wouldn't have any desire to do that, but you know, there's nothing intrinsic. A plot is a plot. People are people. The fact that I'm using a created environment—a self-cleaning environment that has its own ideas about what sort of humans should be allowed to inhabit it—in place of a cyclops doesn't change the basic problem the hero has in getting the hell out when he realizes he'll be dinner if he doesn't. It's the same thing.

I don't have a lot of use for, "Well they land on a planet and there is a giant with one eye in the middle of his forehead who captures them." You can do much better than that by looking at what is going on rather than, "Oh, they're being held and eaten by something for its own reasons." It doesn't have to be a giant with one eye in the middle of its forehead.

**JLB: You're best-known for the Hammer's Slammers series.**

**Have you ever found your close association with military SF limiting in any way?**

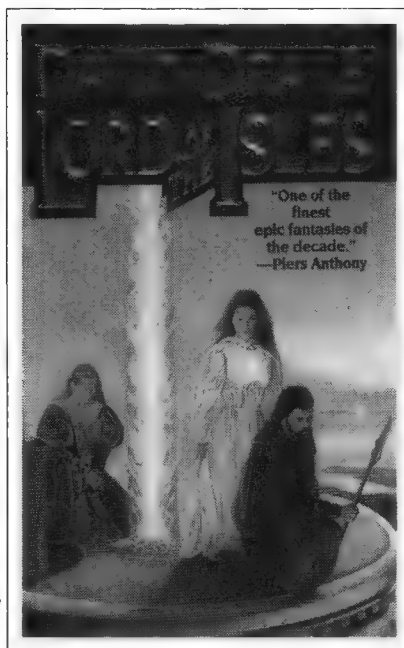
DD: No. Military SF has never been more than about a quarter of my output. Now what has happened, is that a great deal of what I wrote that was not military SF was packaged as though it were military SF. So, okay. I understand marketing, but I regret it sometimes. For example, *Northworld* is space opera based on mythological poetry. And my editor, who hadn't read the book (because I hadn't finished the book) called and said, "We had a cover conference. We're going to put a tank on the cover. Is there a tank in it?" If you want to call that a limitation, then okay. But it didn't keep me from writing the book I wanted to write.

I have never been unable to write the book I wanted to write. I tend to leave everything but my prose to other people. I get very, very pissy about people who do things to my prose. But I do not complain about covers, I do not complain about packaging or marketing or any of those things. I may have opinions, but I keep them to myself. If some idiot copy editor goes in and changes something that I put there and makes it wrong, I go ballistic. And I really mean that. I go ballistic. It fools people, because I'm so easy to get along with mostly—not if it's my prose. I don't mean I won't listen to an editor. What I will not have is somebody look at something and go, "Oh, that must be wrong," and change it. Because you know what? Usually it isn't wrong.

**JLB: What is the hallmark of good mili-**

**tary SF? What does it accomplish?**

DD: Okay, I'm going to give you an honest answer—you may not want to print this. What it did for me was act as therapy when I wasn't very long out of Vietnam and I was crazy as a bedbug. I was able to put things down in writing, and it kept me between the ditches. That is why I wrote it. That is why I kept writing it when it didn't sell. That is something I have heard from a lot of veterans and a lot of people who have been at the sharp end one way or another. I've had them say, "Keep telling it. Keep telling it like it is and maybe they'll understand." Of course they won't understand, which is okay,



but what military SF can do is keep me sane and allow other people who aren't me, but have been in some of those same bad places, see that they are not alone. Because when you come back, you are alone. You are completely alone. And it's not that your

wife doesn't care and it's not that your friends don't care, but they don't understand. The only people who understood are the other people who've been in the same places, and I can speak to them and I can keep my rubber on the road.

**JLB: So then what is the difference between military SF and militaristic SF?**

DD: Oh. That's pretty easy. Militaristic SF is fiction which vaunts and propagandizes for the military. It can be good writing or bad, and when Kipling did it in "The Army of the Dream," it was very good fiction. That isn't what I write. I don't think that anyone who reads what I put on paper thinks I'm propagandizing for the military. What I am doing, if you will, is trying to increase the degree of understanding for the veterans, for the people who've actually done it. If you want to quarrel that they are per se, evil, and there certainly are people—Jane Fonda was not the only one—who felt that someone who was in the military was, by definition, evil, then you can have a problem with what I'm doing. But I'm certainly not propagandizing for war or for the military. I think you can make an argument that *Starship Troopers* was militaristic SF.

**JLB: It straddles both.**

DD: Yeah. Brian Aldiss had a very early, excellent review of the book. He said, "This is a book about discipline." He was absolutely right. Heinlein was describing a society in which military service was used as a way of imposing self-discipline on the entire populace.

You can argue this is a good or a bad thing. Realistically, you could say that was militaristic SF, and it is certainly an important work, a work of high literary value, whether you like it or not. I happen to think it's a very good book.

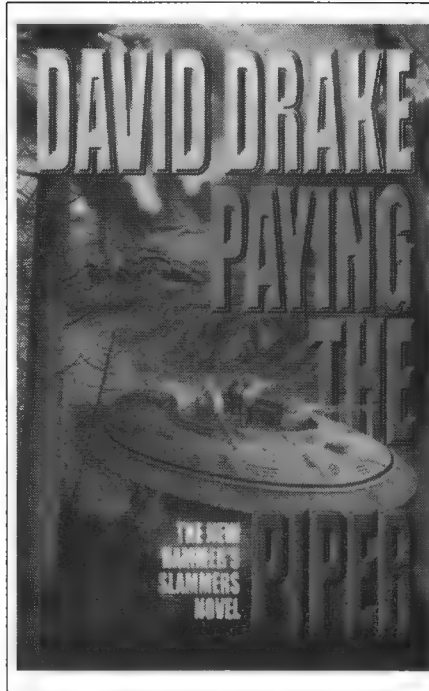
It's also worth noting—which is something Aldiss, who had been a grunt, did notice—Heinlein had been a naval officer, and in his juvenile series, the Space Patrol series, he even has a scene in which the young officer sees a gunnery sergeant with all the medals down—you know, the hash marks down his arms—decides he wants to be a Marine, and gets talked out of it. “You’re really far above that sort of thing, boy,” which is a pretty typical U.S. Naval Academy attitude. Then in *Starship Troopers*, he writes the kid who does become a grunt.

Well, he knew about naval officers. He did not know about grunts. Brian Aldiss knew about grunts, and so do I! (laughing) It gives you a somewhat different viewpoint of the military as an organization depending on which direction you’re looking in! Which is why I get extremely angry—well, let’s put it this way: “Extremely testy,” when people describe me as a writer of militaristic SF. No, I’m not. I was there at the asshole end, thank you!

**JLB: You have an interesting project going on right now with a British gaming group to put out games based on your work.**

DD: A couple of British wargamers put together a package and sold it to the editor of a British wargaming magazine. There will be little prepub Hammer’s Slammers figurines. There are vehicles being made, also. Packages will be available sometime around Christmas 2003 from Ground Zero games. The book should be coming out, roughly then. Old Crow is doing the vehicles.

And these are just incredible! I mean, 25 millimeter figures, and they’re talking about, “Would you mind if we did some actual character figures of Colonel Hammer and Joachim Steuben?” These are an inch tall! How can you possibly see features? The kind of detail they do, using these kind of one-



hair brush paint jobs—you actually can see features! This is just incredible. I’m basically just a resource for them: “Yeah, that’s right. No, no, it should be more rounded here. No, this isn’t quite what I was thinking of.” That sort of thing. They’re doing all the hard work, and I’m just flabbergasted at what they’re getting out of it.

**JLB: What kind of research goes into your work?**

DD: Well, that’s an interesting question, because in a manner of speaking, none. In the sense that I write about the things that interest me, I don’t have to look them up, generally, because I’ve already read that. I’ve got many thousands—many thousands—

of books myself, and if I want a book on a particular thing, I’ll pull down a volume of Gröener’s German Warships and, you know, just basically what was the draft of the Atlantis? Because although I’m working on spaceships, I’m trying to get relative sizes and bulk, weaponry, that sort of thing. I’m just trying to get things right. What was the crew? That sort of thing. I like to get details right. It’s really kind of irritating to me to look at something and realize the guy who wrote that has absolutely no idea what the recoil of that weapon is. And how could you possibly mount it on that? It would flip it over on its back the first time you fired it.

I’ve got lots and lots and lots of technical stuff and historical stuff. Every classical history book on hand. Is that research for the book? No. But it all goes into the book as a result. So it’s kind of I’m researching all the time, or I don’t research. And either answer is correct.

**JLB: You mentioned you read historical works for pleasure. Are you a fan of Livy? Polybius?**

DD: Of course. Marcellinus. Dio Cassius. Tacitus was a superb stylist. The Latin writers I read in Latin. My Greek isn’t that good. I can use the Greek, a Loeb edition, for example, to annotate what the translator had said, but I’m reading the page in translation. I will go to the left side to

see what actual word was used there. That sort of thing.

**JLB: Do you find that reading them in the original language makes a significant difference?**

DD: Actually it does, for me. Because the real detail really matters. I'm reading them for fun—yes, I am jotting down little bits from it, and I'm getting ideas. When I did *Paying the Piper*, I used the Rhodes-Byzantium War as the armature on which I built my story. The political situation in the Eastern Mediterranean at the end of the third century B.C. This is not a very well-known period because, you know, everything was coming apart, but it made quite an interesting period to use as my setting. It fit very well into the Hammer worldview where you have a fragmented galaxy, a lot of economic problems and a lot of internal state problems. The state is fragmenting and large empires started moving in from the edges. You know, as I say, I read them all.

**JLB: Are there any particular historical events, situations, personalities that have you intrigued, which you may use in the future? That you just haven't found the right vehicle for?**

DD: That's a fair question. No. Because, the way I work, it tends to be whatever—I get to the end of a project. I've finished the job. I need to do something else, and I know what it is: Okay, now I need to write an Isles fantasy. Whatever I'm reading then will start to fall into place as an Isles fantasy. There's a fair likelihood that the next Isles fantasy will have a significant amount of background out of Diony-

sus of Halicarnassus, because I'm preparing to dip back into Dionysius of Halicarnassus! (laughing) Everything's so neat! I mean, there's so much really neat stuff out there, and it will all work. It's just figuring out how to make it work. That's what being a writer's about. You don't have to create the material, you have to figure out how to fit it into what you want to work with.

**JLB: How has your education background contributed to your writing?**

DD: Excellent. History and Latin—I was a double major as an undergraduate, history and Latin. Actually, I was a history major and I had something like thirty-two semester hours of Latin. I said, "Hey, can that count as a double major?" They looked and said, "Well, theoretically, you're supposed to have another language,"—I'd had a couple of semesters of German and a couple semesters of Greek—"but yeah, all right." So I was a history and Latin major. And I have a law degree from Duke.

Law is a useful. Legal education is useful in teaching you to think logically. It should be possible to teach people to think logically in some other fashion than running them through law school, but it doesn't work. I gained a lot from that. You don't see a great deal of legal background in my stories, but if you actually read the Hammer series, the underpinning of it is a society based on law, with economics as a real factor in the stories. I think that's significant. That's something that the Kuttners got very well in "Clash by Night" and

"Fury," but a lot of writers simply do not seem to understand economics as an aspect of what happens. There are things you don't do, not because you couldn't do, but because you can't afford to do it. This is significant. I won't say that I actually got that from Duke, but it was a valuable thing to have done.

**JLB: You have a number of books coming out where you've done the outline and other authors have written the meat of the text. Some look down upon this kind of arrangement, derisively referring to it as "sharecropping." What are your thoughts on the matter?**

DD: I wouldn't have any respect for someone who took someone else's work and put his name on it. I wouldn't, and I don't. That's not what I'm doing. I write a plot outline of roughly 10,000 words. And somebody else does the hard work of writing a novel around it. I've never done one because it was my idea that someone else would do the hard work. These have all been situations where my publisher wanted me to do the outline. I have always insisted in these cases, where I just did the outline, the name of the writer who wrote the book—who took the outline and developed it into a novel—goes first in at least as large a type as my name appears. That's my rule. I've had to fight for that, but it's really very simple: If we're not going to do it my way, we're not going to do it.

I don't have a problem with that concept. I don't need the money. There are certainly people who object to what I do, and my feeling is that they are welcome to live their lives as they



wish, and I will live mine as I wish, and that's what society is about.

**JLB: So what do you get out of these collaborations?**

DD: I get my publisher off my back! I find it very easy to do plot outlines. Not everybody does, but it's really easy for me. It's not a lot of work—it's not a lot of money, either. It's a break from doing the hard work of really writing a novel. It's better than short story money. You know, \$5-15,000 for 10,000 words, no big deal. And it can mean royalties when they do well, and they generally have done well.

When the writer's the right writer, it's kind of neat to see how much they're learning from the process. Eric Flint, I think, is much better for having worked with me than he would have been otherwise. And he'll say the same thing, I think. I don't simply write the outline—I remain as a resource and editor. We've spent a lot of time on the phone, with me going over the manuscripts and that sort of thing.

**JLB: You've recently become a grandfather—**

DD: Yes, I did. I didn't have a hell of a lot to do with that, but I did.

**JLB: Has this impacted your outlook as a writer in any way?**

DD: I'm dedicating the next book to my grandson, so I guess that's a change. But no, I didn't live through my son, and I don't expect to live through my grandson. I'm very pleased, and I think it's just a wonderful thing, but it's not my life. My life is basically my work, and I'm living my life. 🐱

## In the Blood

She sighs with the  
thick satisfaction of  
razor slicing through flesh,  
smiles with the  
pain of madness,  
and carves strange hieroglyphics  
into her thighs.

She opens her torso,  
welling with sudden blood,  
traces each breast  
with delicate blade,  
and slices her arms  
from shoulder to wrist  
with concentrated precision.

She searches with bloody fingers  
among crimson-coated blue  
or themeory  
hidden behind tendons  
and embedded in bone,  
as she drips her life  
from porcelain skin.

She whispers secret litany  
of tired and swollen prayers,  
as she trembles and moans  
with the torture of  
remembrance,  
and slowly incises  
through her haunted eyes.

*Julie Shiel, North East, MD*

## The Red House Tavern Tales Series

### RED HOUSE TAVERN TALES No. 6

#### How Ernie Got His Name

*by Christopher J. Jarmick*



I remember the first time Ernie came in.  
That's what we called him  
Nobody else remembers  
but they'll take my word for it  
It was late summer  
He came in and froze near the door  
as his eyes adjusted  
from the bright late afternoon sun  
to the late dusk of Red House  
Then he spotted the pay phone  
near the toilets ;made a call  
Didn't last more than three minutes  
and he left.

"You sure it was the same guy?"  
Fat-ass asked me  
I cleared my throat  
Next time I remember him  
is when Roscoe elbowed me,  
about three weeks after that,  
and motioned with his eyes  
for me to look over at the  
back corner booth.

It was Harry's booth  
and out of respect  
we never sat there.  
Regulars never  
sat there.  
But there he was.  
Writing something in  
in a steno pad.  
He stopped  
looked up at the wall,  
deep in thought,  
and then he was writing again.  
If he knew I was watching him  
it didn't bother him none.

"You know him?"  
Deke asked a few days later.  
I shook my head.  
"He's sitting in Harry's booth."  
"He didn't know Harry," I said.

What did Deke care?  
Next thing you know  
Deke walked over to the table

## The Red House Tavern Tales Series No. 6

glared down at him.  
After a moment he looked up.  
Deke said:  
"What the hell are you looking at?"  
He just sighed  
and looked back at his notebook.  
Deke grabbed at it  
tearing the page he was writing on  
clean off the pad,  
wadded it up  
and threw it right into his face.

Roscoe started slipping off his stool  
Charlie touched his shoulder  
stopping him.

"Hey, I don't want no trouble,"  
we heard him say.  
"Is that right?" Deke spit back.  
They stared at each other for 30 seconds.

I'd seen Deke take a beer mug  
and crack it over quite a few  
folk's head for little reason.

Instead, he smiled and waved his hand.  
"Hell, you ain't bothering anyone,"  
Deke turned toward us.  
"Ernie, here ain't botherin' anyone,"  
he repeated.  
And he never did.

All through the autumn, winter and most  
of the spring  
three, four times a week  
Ernie would come in, late afternoon,  
sit, have a mug of beer  
and write in his steno book.  
Sometimes he stayed an hour  
sometimes two.

Nobody bothered him  
And he never bothered anyone.  
He stopped showing up  
in early June.

I wondered if he'd be back  
in late summer or fall—  
but he wasn't.



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Harry probably wouldn't have minded  
sharing his booth with Ernie,  
we figured.

We imagined Ernie was writing  
a book like 'Catcher in the Rye'  
or 'On the Road,'  
or maybe he was a poet  
like Dylan Thomas.

Don't know about that of course,  
never spoke to him  
never snuck a look  
at what he was writing.  
Just know he sat in Harry's booth  
for almost nine months  
and never bothered  
anyone.

# "Even Colors That Aren't Basic Look Nice if You Match Them Right"

THE LIFE AND ART OF JOSEPH GRIFFITH

Joseph Griffith is of medium height, with an open, radiant expression. Talking with him makes me feel that life is basically good, and that everything will work out one way or another. He had a cold last winter, when I met him in New York's 14th Street subway tunnel linking the 1-2-3 trains with the F and W trains. As we were talking, a young man stopped to look at his 8-1/2 x 11 colored pencil drawings, which were lined up on the ground, leaning against the wall of the tunnel.

Carolyn  
Steinhoff  
Smith

Three of the pictures were of the subway, with buildings in the background. They were obviously a series. I especially liked them and the one of UFOs, so he gave me a ten-dollar discount—thirty dollars for all four. Then a young white couple with a baby stopped to look. The dad bought a tulip picture for the mom, and Joseph gave them an extra piece of cardboard to protect it, on the back of which was a pencil drawing of a woman. "It's OK, I don't want that one any more," he said.

I own five of Griffith's drawings so far. My favorite shows three red UFOs in a pink and blue textured sky, emitting cone-shaped red, yellow and orange striped rays that have set the tops of lapis



blue, turquoise and pink apartment buildings, afire with vivid yellow and red flames. Explosive bursts have damaged a forest green building with rows of yellow, black and white windows; its jagged corner is in a downward trajectory toward black electric poles and wires, and a debris-littered pale brown street.

#### **The Accident**

Griffith said his leg hurt more than usual the day I bought the alien invasion picture. Maybe it was because of the intense cold. He has walked with a cane and a severe limp since his 1986 bike accident. He told me he moved

back to his boyhood neighborhood in the Bronx in 1980, where he met his girlfriend Sondra. They had a son, Quintin, whom he said was 17 at the time of our interview.

Griffith recalled the time he bought a new bike for Quintin, when the boy was four or five. Griffith was riding Quintin down a hill on the bike when they hit a car. Using a stubby pencil he withdrew from somewhere deep within his well-worn coat, he drew me a diagram of the street layout, to show how he hit the car as it came up the hill. He used a dotted line to show his trajectory as he went flying through the air. Quintin had



a little bump on his head, he told me, but as for himself, he couldn't get up.

"My leg was twisted all around. I looked behind me and saw my leg up in the air. Like it was on backwards." He went to Lincoln Hospital, where he found out his pelvis and knee were broken. "They had to put in two pins to hold my leg together, that's how bad it was."

Griffith was born in 1952 in New York's Lower East Side. He lived in Bedford-Stuyvesant, Brooklyn, and also near the Bronx Zoo. "We moved every three years," he said. "I have three brothers and two sisters. I'm the next-to-the oldest."

"When I was coming up my father worked for the ABC TV station, and Mom worked for the Department of Social Services. She was a supervisor in the Food Stamps Department."

It turned out the bike accident was not Griffith's first risky adventure involving hills and wheeled vehicles. "I used to love to play in Kelly

Park in the Bronx. One time we got in our father's pickup. Some got in the cab part, and I was in the back with my brother and a bunch of kids. They took the emergency brake off, and those old trucks don't have a foot brake. Next thing we knew, we were rolling down the hill backwards. That's one thing from childhood that stays with me," Griffith recalled.

### How Griffith Got Started as an Artist

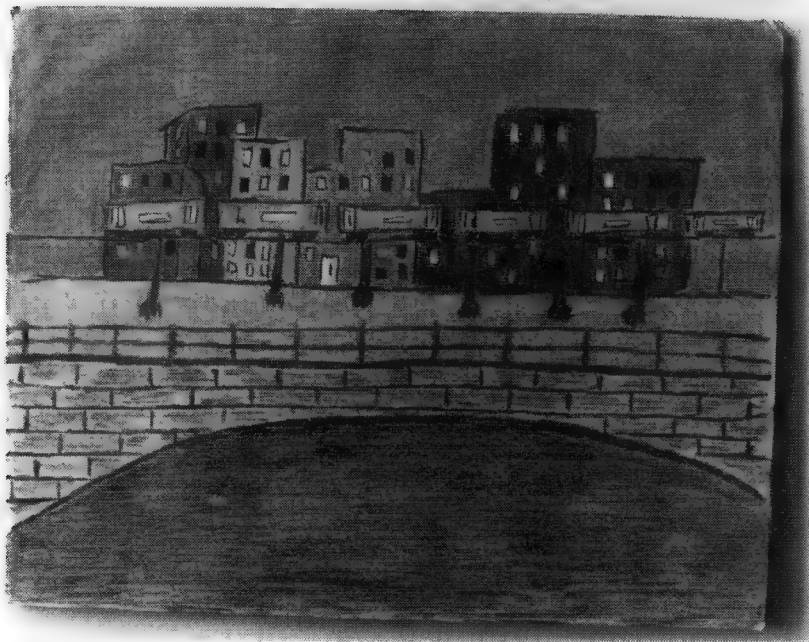
I asked Griffith how he got into art. "When I was twelve years old I started to draw. Mom used to buy me coloring books, paint by number, and colored pencils. She knew I was interested, because I was always marking on things."

"I went to Kay Lane High School in Jamaica, Queens, where I took art classes. One teacher was named Mr. Bassnight. He used to help me, by showing me a whole lot of details, what kind of scenes to draw. He taught me how to draw a tree, that you make two lines on each side; you make some stems, and the leaves. He showed me the basics, the easy way. After I graduated, though, I took off on my own."

Griffith started drawing cartoon characters such as Mickey Mouse, Goofy, Daffy Duck and Betty Boop, from TV and magazines. He soon found it so easy to draw them, he "went the next step," to drawing people and things.

I asked him how he got the ideas for his UFO drawings. "I did lots of UFO's when I was a kid," said Griffith. "That was before I saw the real ship in 1974. I was walking through Linden Plaza on New Lots Avenue in Brooklyn. There were two girls in front of me, about nine years old. One said, 'Ooo look, a flying saucer!' When I looked up it





was right there. It was very huge, with red lights moving around the bottom," he told me, his eyes widening with the memory. "It looked like it was going very slow. Then it disappeared out of sight behind the buildings. The next day I went back over there, to see if I heard any talk about it. A lot of people were outside, but I didn't hear anything. I was going to ask the two girls, to make sure, but I couldn't find them. I never heard anything from anybody. That was what made me start drawing the UFOs again."

Griffith explained that some of his pictures are of real things, but you have to figure them out. He showed me one called "Car Love." On one side of the drawing, there was a car with a heart in the window. On the other side were tumblers containing drinks and straws. Griffith said he was thinking of a limousine, how when people are riding, they might be in love, and they're watching TV and having drinks.

I asked Griffith how he chose the colors he uses, since this is one of the most striking characteristics of his work. "I choose colors that go with each other," he explained. "Basic colors look nice together. Even colors that aren't basic look nice if you match them right."

He says he uses copier paper, typing paper and drawing paper. He backs his drawings with cardboard he cuts from boxes stores throw out. And he uses all brands, all kinds of colored pencils, though he says water-based are the best. "They give you a better picture. The color looks better, and it takes to the paper better. I go by my experience."

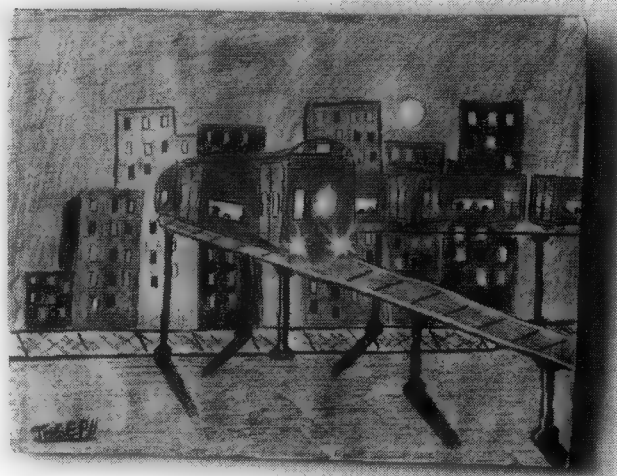
#### **Staying Off the Streets**

Thanks to his drawing

sales, Griffith is able to keep out of shelters and off the street. "Sometimes I stay at a friend's house. When I have money, I go from hotel to hotel. I like the Sunshine, at 3rd and Bowery, or the White House on 4th. They have small rooms for \$20 a day. They call them cubes. There's room for a bed, a TV and a small closet. The bathroom is out in the hall, and there's a kitchen and a shower down the hall, too. Some don't have stoves. I usually go to the store to buy something to eat."

He said the people who run the places are OK, and the people that stay there are friendly. He said he has a good friend, JR, a jazz keyboard musician, with whom he talks and jokes a lot.

"I used to live at 11th Street between Avenue C and Avenue B. Forty years ago, there were beatniks and hippies. The Village always had so much art then," he recalled wistfully. "Time has changed the Village. Things are not happening there like they used to. They had the flower kids around. Those were the most peaceful people." He said he missed them.



## The Life and Art of Joseph Griffith

"Did I tell you about the book I'm in?" he asked me. He said Mitchell Duneier, a professor of sociology, and Pulitzer Prize-winning photographer Ovie Carter included him in a book called *Sidewalk*. The book is "a vivid, patient and moving account of those who have inched up from crime and despair to take control, however precarious and scruffy, of their lives," according to the *New York Times*' Richard Eder. Griffith told me Duneier paid him and everyone he profiled in the book.

### The Future

I asked Griffith if he had plans for the future. "There's not much I can do anymore. My leg really messed up my whole career, my whole future. I hope I can manage with the art." Griffith said he wants to start a business making painted flowerpots to sell. He said he did this last summer, and sold the pots for \$25 each. "I put balloons on some, and birds. I won't have to do as

much work, and people will be able to use them in restaurants, even gambling places. I'll never run out of pictures to paint on them." He said he hopes his friend Duneier will help him get the money together. "I would need a small little factory, just a spot to work from, a walk-in. I'll call it The Wonderful World of Art Flower Pots."

I looked for Griffith in the 14<sup>th</sup> street tunnel recently, but he wasn't there. Wherever he is, I hope the cosmos repays him for the pleasure he has given me and so many others by making his drawings. His strange and original subject matter, ranging from representations to abstractions, his optimistic, straight-ahead sensibility and the striking use of color and design he accomplishes with colored pencils alone, make his art strongly deserving of a wider audience. 🐱





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## “Ars Brutica”

Classic Rock radio stations play one to five top hits from any given music group. Thus there are entire generations of fans who think Pink Floyd began, and largely ended, with *THE WALL*, with a few forays into *DARK SIDE OF THE MOON* of course. They never heard of Syd Barrett and don't know why Eugene should be careful with that axe. The never set controls for the heart of the deep cuts that shine on in some of our memories. Who has time for Album Oriented anything? It's all about sampling and sound bites and compressed music played faster than intended to make more room in each hour for more commercial blather and muttered disclaimers.

On TV, we see only those shows that sustain a large enough audience to convince advertisers to buy time during the show. Any show with sporadic appeal, or that doesn't reach a big enough swath of the TV viewing audience, is dumped, fast. No room for the quirky, the idiosyncratic, or the genuinely creative.

Movies used to be fun to make but now they cost so much, and investors have so much riding on a film's success, that every aspect of the movie is filtered through focus groups and pilfered from prior successes. Derivative and hollow, the stories needn't even make sense any more. No one cares or even much notices.

Why? Because we're so conditioned as consumers that we no longer go to see *GONE WITH THE WIND* or *CASABLANCA* or *THE MALTESE FALCON*.

We instead go see a movie. If you ask someone what movie they saw over the weekend, often they cannot recall, at least not without much effort. This is because they weren't there for that story, only for the general consumer experience of seeing a movie. Content doesn't matter anymore.

Same with TV, by the way. Increasingly, people watch TV, not a given show.

We stare and gape and drool as we cram popcorn and chips and pizza into our mouths. We wash the salt down with sweet drinks, too -- salt and sugar cycles firing in a baby's notion of contentment.

This is the gist of Neil Postman's book *Amused to Death*. It's what Harlan Ellison's *Glass Teat* columns for the *Free Press* were about in the 1970s. It's what Plato griped about in *The Critias*. It's a perennial problem but our world media is worsening it.

Art is increasingly commercial. We lose variety and miss insights if we allow market demographics and considerations of profit and appeal determine our Art.

In times past Art was almost solely patronized. That means rich guys paid for the artists they liked, and



churches commissioned works by well-known artists. And those artists had to please their patrons every bit as much as today's must please the mass audience. It was just as merciless as any ratings system, and displeasing one's patron sometimes cost limbs or lives.

There are patrons today of course. EXXON and MOBILE OIL and so on pay for this or that Public TV documentary or concert, while Archer Daniels Midland supports the arts, too, in their own way. Thing is, they tend to sponsor what meets with their approval, and their corporate mentality tends to find fringe Art objectionable. The rich folks like to keep their sport behind closed doors, it seems.

So where can an artist from the Wild Side find refuge? Truth is, there are many individual places where real Art thrives. They are the tidal pools of a new world, a new kind of life. Real Art is done not for commercial profit but because the artists involved simply HAD to or they'd burst.

This brings us to Art Brut. It's an artistic movement named and isolated by Jean DeBuffet. You can read about him and about the movement on this website. You can even see some examples of Art Brut and find more by following links and doing searches of your own.

Now, keep in mind that BRUTARIAN and [www.brutarian.com](http://www.brutarian.com) are not pure Art Brut. They reach out to the public, and they offer a platform for art, stories, and discussions of movies and music that is intended not just to divert and entertain you, but to elevate you a little, expand your horizons, and, ideally, to send you on a quest for your own experience of Art Brut as it prowls the human jungle. Find it in the wild and you'll see how truly powerful individual expression can be.

And there are those among us who appreciate such things, who find not only Art Brut but other forms, from the crude and lewd to the truly spectacular and breath-taking worth supporting. Modern patrons on lone missions of merciless celebration.

Dom Salemi is the patron of BRUTARIAN and [www.brutarian.com](http://www.brutarian.com). He pays for this, and he channels any money he might make from it back to the artists and writers who make it possible. Not that he's in the black, far from it.

- So realize, as you read this, that it is the result of a labor of love.
- This is about keeping real Art alive, and giving the best of the uncommercial travelers a forum to showcase their wares. To frolic and play; that's what they do, even from the depths of madness or the shrieking halls of pain some inhabit.

BRUTARIAN and its shadowy brethren, breeding in the tidal pools at the edge of our sinking civilization, keep the light of genuine Art alive. These individual publications, galleries, recording studios, and independent movie makers stubbornly refuse to capitulate to the corporate.

- They won't buckle under and pump out pap for the suckling masses. They simply create, and if you're drawn to their gods' fires, so much the better for all.

So venture out past the lights, into the dark. And, once there, follow those faint glows you may be lucky enough to spot. Better yet, squat down and start your own faint glow.

This is Ars Brutica at its finest. This is life being alive.

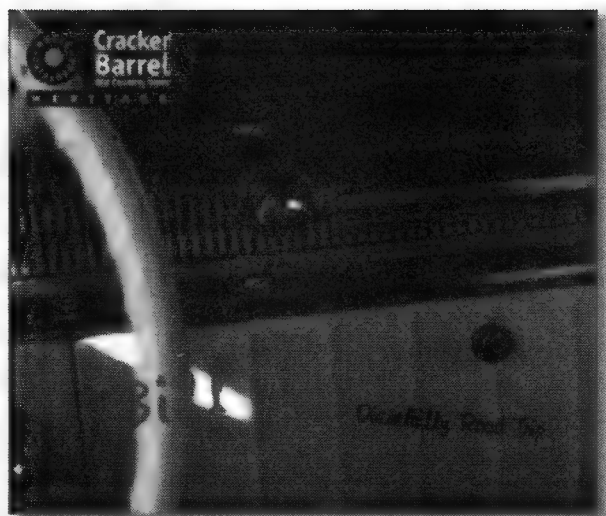
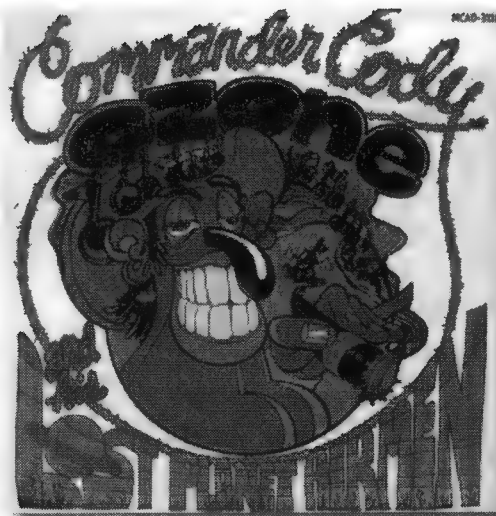
Wake up and dream.



# From **Commander Cody** to **Cracker B**

Best known to babyboomers as lead guitarist for the eclectic hippie-era aggregation Commander Cody & His Lost Planet Airmen, Bill Kirchen enjoys a certain renown as a one of the premier roots artists of our time. Whether an integral part of the Nick Lowe-produced Moonlighters or on his own, the Michigan native's sound personifies hot-footin' good times and hollow-chested heartaches, and the wanderlust of life on the road. Moreover, his albums for Black Top and Hightone demonstrate an unerring sense of taste and production savvy. After decades of honing his chops in bar rooms worldwide, Kirchen's mix of Bakers-

field twang, Delta blues, and good ol' rock'n'roll has made him a 10-time Wammie Award-winning favorite in the D.C. area where he now resides. With Hightone following the rest of the music industry into the financial hard times, the singer-songwriter/archivist released his latest disc Diesel-billy Road Trip through a label supported by the Cracker Barrel restaurant chain. Speaking from his home, the affable and articulate Kirchen spoke to us about his early influences, musical odyssey with Commander Cody, various band associations, substance abuse, the new disc, and of course "Hot Rod Lincoln."



# Cracker Barrel Bill Kirchen

**BK:** I grew up in Ann Arbor, Michigan. My dad worked at Ford and the big school trip when I was a kid was visiting the River Rouge plant to watch them make steel for cars. I can still remember it. It was fantastic. I was a little boy and this giant ass cold rolled steel plant with molten steel flying around was totally happening. Later on my dad worked in Dearborn for Ford and various places.

**KB:** By chance did you happen to listen to WKNR Keener 13 out of Detroit? They played a mix of British invasion hits, Motown, Statler Brothers, garage rock, Dean Martin, and novelty records all mixed together. That seems to res-

onate through the type of music that you do.

**BK:** Yeah, it does. If I listened to that station, I probably wasn't aware of it because I did not listen to a whole heck of a lot of radio. When I was a kid, we listened to Canadian radio. CBE which was the Windsor affiliate of the CBC. That was the radio of choice in our home, primarily because it was a talk and classical station. So, I didn't listen to much radio. When I got turned onto country music during the mid '60s, I got into it pretty much by buying those \$1.98 cutout records that were available. I probably listened to WKNR a lit-

tle bit during that time. I do know that was the wildest thing about that era that you could hear Otis Redding and Buck Owens on the same station. That was totally cool and that is gone now. Segregation in that sense is even stronger and more deeply entrenched these days.

**KB:** I've read that you first started out playing a trombone.

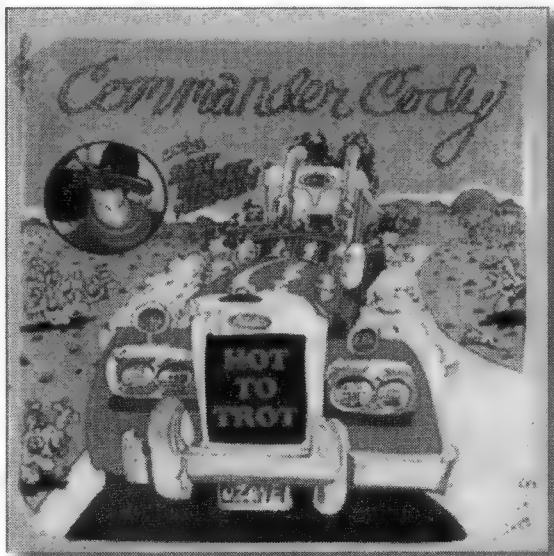
**BK:** Yes, I was a classical trombone guy. I went to Interlocken music camp in the early '60s as a student. My cabinet counselor played guitar and his name is Dave Sigland. He still runs The Ark in Ann Arbor which is one of the premier acoustic music venues in the U.S. It's

been going for least 30 years. So, through him I got into the big folk scene. I started listening to folk music and got into old-timey and blues in particular. I learned the banjo around 1964. I switched to the guitar that same year. In '64 and '65, I went to the Newport Folk Festival. If I had to put my finger on life changing experiences, that's right up there at the top of the list.

**KB: Tell us little bit about that.**

BK: I was lucky enough to hear music from people who by and large hadn't spent a lot of time away from their little regions. So, I got to hear music that developed in specific regions. Specifically old-timey and what became known as bluegrass music from southwestern Virginia, eastern Tennessee, Kentucky. I saw the Stanley Brothers, Bill Monroe, the Lilly Brothers from West Virginia. So, I experienced some on music the carried strong strains of the old Elizabethan ballads that came through. I saw blues singers from the delta, Son House, Robert Pete Williams, Rev. Robert Wilkins. That Delta blues sound was just from a tiny little area, something the size of southeastern Michigan. I saw Mississippi John Hurt. I saw gospel music like the Georgia Sea Island Singers, weird gospel choral stuff. All these things that would be over within a decade. The majority of people that I saw were not mass media type guys. There were name performers like Doc Watson, but nowadays I'm sure that there are Eminem tapes up on the top of Mount Everest. That's fine, I'm just saying that it's a different world now. But I was lucky enough to witness that music. When you get music that is so deep into its own region and refined in that way, you're hearing something special. That just thrilled me to see those guys. Son House got up on stage and he talked real soft. I remember thinking, "Oh great, some old burn out. What else is going on?" At that point I don't think there were multiple stages, I think it was just one great big evening concert. So, he's up there mumbling softly and all the sudden he hits the slide to his big old steel Nashville guitar, tilts his head back and his eyes roll out of sight. All you

can see are the whites of his eyes and this unearthly sound comes out of his mouth. He sang some big scary Son House biblical retribution song and I remember that the hair just went right up on the back of my neck. It scared the shit out of me. I got to see all those guys and plus I was a real Bob Dylan fan. I don't think people born after you and me know why Bob Dylan is such a superstar. You've got to know the first 10 albums, I think. That's my humble opinion. Maybe I'm just a crotchety old geezer now. You go back and listen to those records and he was just a spectacular singer. The myth of him not being a good singer? I don't think so! He was a great singer. He was hitting all the notes he wanted to and more.



**KB: I think there is this popular conception that good vocalists come from the crooner tradition. People who hadn't been preconditioned by folk and blues, they generally don't get Bob Dylan.**

BK: Right. That's a good point. Another thing I've been noticing too, I came out of that dead-white-people-composing-tradition in classical music. When I would hear blues singers with abnormal numbers of beats and measures and eccentric slow down and speed up, I would think that was incompetency right off the bat. I later realized that couldn't be farther from the truth. Blind Lemon Jefferson, that guy was not fucking up when he played the guitar. He was bad to the bone playing stuff that was tricky and syncopated. He had an odd number of beats in the measures but that wasn't an accident, that was just a different tradition.

**KB: Blind Lemon Jefferson was a proponent of direct expression, he may not be able to do a song exactly the same way twice, but he got to the guts of the matter.**

BK: I think he could do the songs the same way twice. See, I think that some of those things that to us sounded like something he couldn't repeat, were in fact compositional. You're

right that there was improvisational expression involved, but I'm not so sure he couldn't do it same way twice. But I saw all that. Dylan going electric had a big effect on me. I don't remember him being booed at all at Newport. I never could figure out what people were talking about. Later I read a book by Al Kooper that backed me up on that. What happened was that later, booing Dylan became something akin to a team sport. I went to Newport once when I was in high school and the second time right after high school. I hitchhiked to Greenwich Village when I was still in high school, and saw the Chambers Brothers, who I had seen at Newport Festival playing bottles and fifes like an old-time Mississippi jug band – real acoustic field stuff. In Greenwich Village they had on sharkskin suits, skinny ties, and werwe playing "Louie Louie." I loved that. I didn't know you could do both! (Laughs.) I didn't know that Big Bill Broonzy had been a suave cat with a Camel hair coat and had been a respected professional musician in Chicago.

**KB: We thought of him as a guy who lived his life in overalls.**

BK: That's right! Just because Elmore James played bottleneck, I expected him to be dressed in a barrel or something. It was such a shock to your preconceptions, "Wow, where'd he get that killer suit?" He was a killer, professional happening dude. I saw country music at the same time too for the first time. I saw all the bluegrass and old-timey cats. And if you're talking country among the blues cats – Mississippi John Hurt. I guess the best way I could

describe what happened later was that I got turned onto Buck Owens and Merle Haggard. Particularly those first Merle Haggard records. I loved the Buck Owens records for the sound and some of the songs, but those first Merle Haggard records were just a revelation to me. That was what I was enjoying about folk music, it had more interesting themes. That's another thing people forget – those songs on the Harry Smith Anthology records, those songs didn't make sense and they weren't supposed to make sense. "I Wish I Was A Mole In the Ground," those are whacked out, impressionistic songs. That wasn't the greatest time in pop music, the mid-60s, and for my tastes the psychedelic thing had gone a little past the mark.

**KB: I liked psychedelia as an additive to the music, but I turned away from the radio when it became the main thrust of the music.**

BK: I'm with you on that. As a matter of fact the big Prog-Rock thing I never got into. I couldn't have told you which was a Pink Floyd song or what. I went retro right then and it was the greatest thing to hear Merle Haggard sing "I Can't Hold Myself In Line," and that whole big bunch of early hits like "Lonesome Fugitive." That was written by Liz Anderson, Lynn Anderson's mom. It was just a revelation to me.

**KB: That sense of authenticity was very important to the folk crowd, almost to the point of making them snobs.**

BK: Right. In hindsight, I've had some serious misconceptions. It has taken me a long time to realize that music has always been commercial. A lot of the

distinctions between folk and commercial don't hold up. Everybody was trying to get over and sell a song one way or another. Robert Johnson was a savvy, sophisticated, informed musician for his time. The themes that he dealt with showed that, but it became uncool to talk like that and I miss that. That's what I liked, songs with some depth of emotion, some adult themes, authentic descriptions of things I didn't have available to me. At some point you're tired hearing about the high school dance because that's the only thing you do know about." Excuse me, I want to hear about Skid Row. I don't know fuck all about Skid Row." I used to be enamored of hearing Dave Von Ronk sing about cocaine. Little did I dream that it would end up being a horror show. It was extremely attractive when Dave sang about it.

**KB: Tell me about some of the first groups you were part of.**

BK: The first band I ever assembled was for a high school talent show. I've got a great picture in the yearbook of the Iguanas with Iggy Pop on drums and me with my jugband with all of us wearing our Mexican serapes and girls with high leather boots; 1965 hippie garb. We had a jugband I called The Who Knows Pickers. In the yearbook they missed out on my whole pun and they put it as "The New Nose Pickers." It was just put together for the talent show. There were six or seven of us and I remember we were doing "Stealin'" and something else. We had just got the Dylan record with "Subterranean Homesick Blues" on it, so we plugged in and we were going to do that and the guy who ran the tal-



ent show insisted that we not do that. In hindsight that seems weird and I was a wuss to acquiesce. But we did. They liked acoustic folk at talent shows and I think they put out bales of hay for us. Then I took the year off after I graduated from high school in 1965. As far as my academic career went, that was a fatal mistake. But as far as my musical career went, I think it worked out just fine. I went out to California with my parents and we hopped freights back from San Francisco to Ann Arbor to start a band. We left the Avalon Ballroom having just seen Bo Diddley. One of the opening acts was The Sons of Adam. They were three or four guys who weighed 250 pounds between them and they played their guitars at full extension, like right around their crotches. I'd never seen such a thing. Bo Diddley was there with an electric violin and three female vocalists. Anyway, we headed home to start a band and we got as far as Galesburg, Illinois where I got my foot run over by a train, of all things. The reason I still have a foot is that the train wheels and tracks are both convex and it didn't get all the way into the lip on the back, which would've just lopped everything off. It broke three of my toes in two places each and squashed my foot open like a sausage, so I had to spend the day there getting stitched up and then sent home. But we came home and started a band called The Seventh Seal. We did whatever we could think to do in Ann Arbor. I found out you could rent the band shell in West Park, which was near where I grew up and saw brass band concerts as a kid. We rented that and put on a show every Sunday.

**KB: Who was in the Seventh Seal?**

BK: Myself, Ron Miller on bass, Steve Elliot on drums usually, and then various piano players. The first one was Andy Sacks. He was a photographer in Ann Arbor. Then we went through Garby Leon, Steve Yennick, Danny Chesluck. So we played whatever we could think of. In terms

of chronology as noted by current Dylan albums, I know *Blonde On Blonde* was just out. We did "Leavin' Her," the Holland-Dozier-Holland song, stuff from the Motown catalog. That was around the time we started doing these long extended jams. We were trying to a cue from the West Coast groups like the Charlatans and Jefferson Airplane. We'd do Sleepy Jon Estes, a Fugs song, anything we could get through. I'm sure we sucked.

**KB: So no tapes exist from that era?**

BK: Oh man, I had a tape on that band. I think Ron Miller ended up with it. It was hilarious! I was singing in this bizarre wobbly-assed voice and I thought, "What in God's green earth was I thinking of?" Then it finally occurred to me that I had been listening to one of my favorite records; that first record Geoff Muldaur put out before he was in the jugband called "Sleepy Man Blues" on Prestige. So, I was basically imitating Geoff Muldaur, who was essentially imitating Skip James. I was affecting this really high vibrato-laden voice. It was bizarre to hear. At that point in time, we played the Ann Arbor Film Festival too. It might have been the same year that the Velvet Underground was there. But I ran into the crowd at the University of Michigan Art School, including George Frayne, aka the Commander, and his brother Chris, who did all the wonderful album art, especially the big-nosed commander figure for Commander Cody & His Lost Planet Airmen.

**KB: Did you attend U of M?**

BK: Well, I went for one semester. My daughter is about to go off to college and I realize that I'm not one to tell her anything since my grade point average at the University of Michigan was a .25. Thank you very much. The way you do that, in case you're interested, is that you basically only go for one semester and then forget to withdraw. Somebody gave me a mercy D along the way. (Laughs.) They won't soon forget the time I

matriculated. I went a year late and it was during the same time I started this band. It was a good thing because I ran into the whole Commander Cody bunch and then I got a crash course in country music. Here's what I heard in the space of a year. Billy C. Farlow had a tremendous Hank Williams collection and we discovered the old MGM mono LP had the original stuff with just the Drifting Cowboys, whereas they overdubbed a bunch of stuff on the stereo ones. John Tichy brought the Buck and the Merle to the party, I think. We discovered a Bob Wills' album in a record cut-out bin because it had a great grinning full-sized shot of Bob Wills. We brought it home and put it on and it was all this inscrutable hot swing and Bob would holler "Flea bite!" and "Domino!" for no apparent reason. We being stoned hippies, would just fall about the floor.

**KB: So basically, Commander Cody was doing the same thing as the Seventh Seal?**

BK: That's kind of true. If there was an advantage to those days of overindulgence and no business plan, it allowed some interesting creative things to crop up unencumbered by any common sense or practicality. One interesting thing was, we had four totally different front men. Three of us sang. Tichy, Billy C. and myself. The Commander would get up and do the talking stuff. Everybody just really sang whatever they wanted to. So, we had George and Tichy who had been in Frat Rock bands forever - and for awhile I tried to play "Under The Double Eagle" as fast as I

could until I messed up and then Tichy would come in playing "Ramrod" on top of it. We had an authentic Alabama hillbilly in the form of Billy C. Farlow, but he had moved to Detroit and became a harp-playing bluesman. He not only could sing Hank Williams but he was very familiar with stuff by Sonny Boy Williamson and Little Walter. He was a grand harp player and blues



singer. Cody had inexplicably become a tremendous boogie-woogie player. So, we had that catalog working for us there. Then we had me, the town hippie who came up through the folk thing, but I took a shine to the weepers. I'd sing stuff like "Green, Green Grass of Home" and eventually "Seeds and Stems."

**KB: That cross pollination of styles was pretty revolutionary at the time. Where did the audience for that hybrid sound come from?**

BK: We played a lot to people who had never heard country music before. I myself had grown up in Ann Arbor and I

really didn't know that there was such a thing. I was into classical music and folk before rock'n'roll. I kind of knew that there was such a thing as country music, but I really didn't know what it referred to. So, when I heard it, it was all brand new. I couldn't believe my luck. I just cleaved unto it. I couldn't get enough of the stuff. As far as the audience goes, people were not adverse

to hearing different genres back-to-back then. The way I look at it is, whatever condition you're in that allows you to listen to a whole Pink Floyd album at one sitting, you're going to be pleasantly surprised with eight people on stage, four different vocalists, and a bunch of bizarre instruments like a pedal steel guitar and electric fiddle. It's going to get you some attention. From a commercial sense, I think it was one of those bubbles where the musicians temporarily escaped the corporate hold. It was right during that era when some guys from the '40s, '50s, and '60s, who had

traditionally and consistently been ripped off, were starting to get some money. Other people were also becoming aware that it didn't have to be that way; that they could demand more of what they were actually earning in the marketplace. It was before the whole record business went through the roof and they were able to compress pop music into this saleable package. Nobody knew what the next big thing was, so they were letting all this wacky stuff on the radio. There was some great shit too. Listen to those Sly and the Family Stone records from the early '70s. Those are fantastic records I think.

**KB: For better or worse, your audience comprised your peers, didn't it?**

BK: They were, at the time, my peers and still are, I've noticed. My kind of crowd has followed me throughout the years. Which is good but the whole touring blues and roots band scene has pretty much died. Even ten years ago there were a lot of regional touring blues acts. That's kind of over. The young people coming up aren't as interested somehow. I guess there's just too much competition for your entertainment dollar. They were our peers and we did not play the Southeast that much. That wasn't our big area. One of the reasons I felt we didn't, was because they already knew this music. It was their parents' music. We were very strong in New York because that was not their parents' music. So when they heard "Smoke That Cigarette," it was new to them. The other thing is that we had a pretty dynamic stage show. As a rule I've found that if I can play in front of people, they generally like it. I have a greater difficulty getting people through the door than I have keeping them there. I just happen to know a bunch of cool tunes, most of which I didn't write.

**KB: That doesn't bother you does it? Some guys feel like they have to write every song on their album.**

BK: No, that doesn't bother me at all. As a matter of fact, I have to remind myself to write songs. It doesn't come really naturally to me and there are some advantages that I miss out on by not writing more. I'm also happy to be a curator and interpreter. There was a tradition of people who never wrote their songs. Shit, Dylan didn't even write the songs on his first album. You just didn't do it. You weren't supposed to write your own folk songs. Supposedly they went to Merle Travis and said, "Folk music is huge! Write me some folk music." Travis said, "You can't write folk music." He was told, "You can - go ahead." The guy was right. Merle could write folk music. He wrote "Dark As A Dungeon," "16 Tons," "Smoke That Cigarette."

**KB: Stuff that had a folk theme.**

BK: That's right, and that was the lesson learned. I've been listening to Greg Brown. He was on the Prairie Home Companion as a staff writer for awhile in its early days. He's put out a prodigious number of records and in fact he started Red House records. I knew about Red House because it's Minneapolis based and I bought a Spider John Koerner record. Koerner is largely accepted as being a mentor to Bob Dylan early on. Most of his success came with this band called Koerner, Ray, Glover. They were so cool. I saw them at the '65 folk festival. Three guys. They had two guitars and a harmonica and they looked great, they had funky clothing - sideburns and engineering boots. They were a great bunch of colorful guys and Minneapolis is a great music town. Always has been. Anyway, I saw an album called Nobody Knows The Trouble I've Seen. It was on Red House by John Koerner. Greg Brown is a modern songwriter, he just married Iris DeMent. So, I'm trying to keep up with some of the modern singer-songwriters in my area of interest, but it's not easy, I'll confess. I went and saw that guy Vic Chestnut the other day and, I don't know, it was too deep for me. I liked it to a point.

**KB: Why did the Lost Planet Airmen choose to leave the Detroit/Ann Arbor area for San Francisco?**

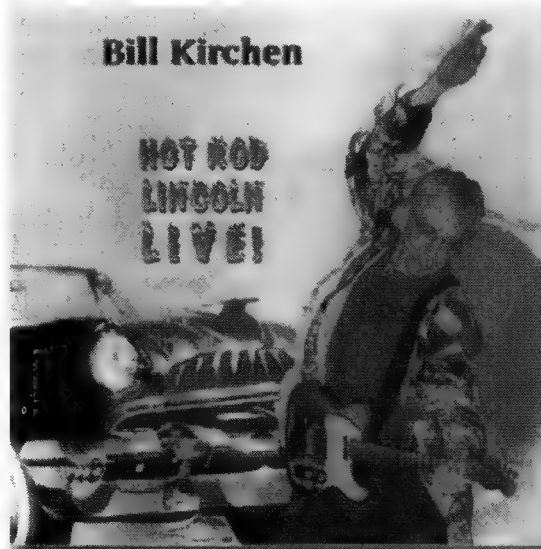
BK: The band essentially had broken up. George Frayne, the ol' Commander, took a job teaching art on Oshkosh, Wisconsin. John Tichy went off to Georgia Tech to get his doctorate in Mechanical & Fluid Engineering, I did the "Go west, young man" thing and went out to California. I started playing in the San Francisco and Berkeley area. I put together a little band and played some of the songs I knew with Cody and some of the shit I knew before. Basically, I convinced the guys come out there and join me. After one year, George became disenchanted with teaching. In

'69, a bunch of 'em, hopped in the van Billy C., the Creeper, Cody, and maybe the Cody's brother came out and we started the Cody band out in San Francisco. My friends in the Cleanliness & Godliness Skiffle Band had been playing with a bluegrass band called High Country, and I was just convinced that there was room for us to play in this environment. I also phoned home and told 'em, "If you play outdoors in the park, girls take their shirts off." They were like, "No way." I said, "Yes, way."

Mind you, during the late 60s this was big doings. "Yeah, they dance naked in the park, I'm not kidding." Anyway, they all came out. We pooled some money, I had a couple of motorcycles, I sold one of them and supported the band for a little while and we lived communally in Emeryville, California. First they crashed at an apartment I was renting in San Francisco. I lived in the Mission District, very near this bar that I played early on, but never with Cody, called Harris's Town Pub. It had this very bizarre three-way racial tension between the blacks, Samoans, and hillbillies. They all drank together. I remember this one guy would come by and he'd say, "Come on and look in my car." He's open up his trunk and he'd have these cheap Japanese guitars and a bunch of fucking submachine guns. Then another time, a guy got pissed off and he came by with a "Molotov Cock-tail" and he was going to throw it into the bar. My buddy said, "Just throw it against the wall outside, it'll be cooler." He threw it against the wall and it went

"Kuh-whoooooomph!" It was funky. After being a nice college boy from Ann Arbor where I led a very sheltered existence, it was sort of exciting to be out there. The Mission was a great area at that point. It was a real family, multi-ethnic neighborhood. I really liked it.

**KB: San Francisco seemed to be a good place for jugbands switching over to rock, but wasn't Commander Cody & The Lost Planet Airmen eccentric even by those standards?**



BK: Right. Well, our niche was the fact that we were aggressive hillbilly and bad boy too. Billy C. had an aggressive persona in a way. He was actually southern and he could really pour it on. We didn't do the "peace - love" thing. In retrospect, there were a lot of guys doing a great, but diluted version of the country music things. Some of them were opposed to what they felt were the whiney, high pitched harmonies. We opened for the Grateful Dead at the Family Dog. Somebody made this great tape from the audience and the mike

swings around and you can't hear the band anymore but you hear two guys in the audience and you swear it sounds like Cheech & Chong. "Wow man! Is that the Grateful Dead?" "No man, it's like Commander Cody, man." "Huh?" (Louder and slower.) "Commander Cody." It was a precious moment. But I was singing Merle Haggard's "Mama Tried," and Bob Weir - Bob Weir would have to be high on the list of people who were delighted with themselves.

But Bob came up to me and said, "You know that song you did, 'Mama Tried?'" "Yeah." He said, "That's a good song but you might consider updating your tonalities." Then he took the guitar and gave me a little illustrated lecture. "Here's how you sang it." Then he imitated me imitating Merle Haggard, and then he said, "Now try it like this." He just slowed it down (imitates dragging Dylan type voice.) "First thing I remember knowing..." I was just sitting there biting my tongue to keep from laughing. Anyway, I'm sure he's right, maybe we should have updated our tonalities, but it was just hilarious to get an illustrated lecture on the point.

**KB: A lot of baby boomers had a love-hate relationship with country music early on. We wanted the right to make fun of it but it was a satisfying, if not guilty pleasure for many of us.**

BK: Let me talk a little bit about that. First off. We were somewhat tongue-in-cheek about this. But I felt we were never smug or giggly about it. We truly loved this stuff but there was something else at work. On the one hand, we loved it and weren't trying to make fun of it as we sang. As a matter of fact,

what bugs me about it today are the dress-up bands who are sort of giggling about how "cute" country is. But we tried to do it real straight faced. However, here's one of the things that bugged me the most. We played with Merle Haggard on a big old Coliseum show, right at the peak of his "Fighting Side of Me," "Oakie From Muskogee" period. Why Merle would not admit that he was stoned as a rat when he wrote "Oakie From Muskogee" is beyond me. I guess for his own personal political and personal reasons he did not want to. When he wrote "Fightin' Side of Me," I'm sure he wasn't kidding. It was such a divisive time. In an interview I read, Merle was talking about Gram Parsons at one point, about meeting those guys when Gram was making his record out there with James Burton, and Merle said, "Y'know. His whole reputation was based on how stoned he was and loaded. I don't mean any offense, but I'm sorry, but I don't think this guy could keep up with us." (Laughs.) Which I always thought was sort of the case. We hippies prided ourselves on how stoned we were, but geez, there was this tradition in country music of eatin' a hundred ben-nies, drinking a fifth of whiskey, and throwing your clothes out the window of the hotel room. I had to tip my hat to those cats.

**KB: So, the hippie rockers didn't have anything to fear from the true country crowd because they had something in common?**

BK: That's right. I saw this go down in some interesting ways. George Frayne, who is from Long Island, of all the people in that band, was never that comfortable with the whole Nashville thing. They weren't comfortable with him and he wasn't comfortable with them. When the original band broke up, I'm sure he'd be the first to tell you that he tried hard to distance himself from that stuff. Because I was from the Midwest, not New York, maybe I was enough of a corn-fed Midwesterner that I could relate to it better. There were some cultural gaps to be bridged. That whole North - South thing. I'm kind of aware of it now being on the borderline between Virginia, Maryland, and D.C., which is sort of a southern town.

**KB: In that era, there was this feeling or even agenda that music was supposed to bring people together - blacks, whites, shake 'em on down loose kids, hillbillies. Few bands did that as uniquely as Commander Cody & The Lost Planet Airmen.**

BK: Well, there certainly was more of a tradition of it at the time. I think we had strength in numbers. There were a lot of different personalities in the band so it was harder to chicken out. We did go to Nashville. We were signed to Dot and Paramount and we went to Nashville and played what we thought was country music. In those days we were on bills with War, which had an urban black audience. So, you had to get up on your hind legs and just do whatever you were going to do with whoever you were with. It was a good experience. I remember when the Cody band was on hiatus

between Ann Arbor and California, me and Billy C., and Creeper would cut out hair off, grease it all back with Dixie Peach, smoke cigars, and go down to Nashville just to hang out and try to pass. It was cool. When we went back there all long-haired and full of ourselves, there was that sense that we were up to the same thing. We were pretty inclusive. We did Clifton Chenier, some hard core Sonny Boy, some Hank songs, rockabilly.



**KB: Was Commander Cody's greatest achievement the fact that they opened up certain genres like zydeco or rockabilly to new audiences?**

BK: Right. Well, we did kind of predate any other rockabilly revival that I'm aware of. But yeah I think so. I think we sold more Merle Haggard, Gene Vincent, and Bob Wills records than we did Cody records. Perhaps that's how it should be. I've always sort of seen myself in that light as sort of a curator or singing archivist. Sometimes I'll like an old song so much that I won't mind trying to copy it exactly when I sing I because I'll regard it as something like the Mona Lisa and I don't want to put a damned moustache on it.

**KB: Do you take any pride in the fact that Commander Cody and His Lost Planet Airmen predated the rockabilly**



**revival?BK:** Oh yeah, sure I do. I didn't get a chance to be the originator of that particular stuff but it's a nice feeling when people finally catch on to things you've been enjoying down through the years. We never really played authentic rockabilly but we were definitely informed by it.

**Did Commander Cody even expect to have a hit with "Hot Rod Lincoln?"**

BK: No. The first record we put out was "Lost in the Ozone." We thought that was the greatest idea. (Sings.) "One drink of wine, two drinks of gin, lost in the ozone again." It was just a drinking song. So, we put that out and needless to say it sank like a stone. Then, the record company said, "We think this 'Hot Rod Lincoln' might have a chance." We went, "Huh?" and "No." (Laughs.) So, we put it out. I don't remember us thinking it had a chance at all, but once you put out a hit record, it always seems easy. I think we were always slightly surprised and disappointed that we didn't have another one. (Chuckles.)

We thought, "This is a piece of cake. Every other record you put out is a big smash hit." Also, in those days we had momentum as both an underground album-oriented FM radio type act. In hindsight, although the hit gave us longevity. I've been milking it ever since - at the time it didn't seem to change our fortunes that much. We just continued doing what we were doing.

**KB: Did you have a chance to meet the song' originator Charlie Ryan?**

BK: We met him back in the day. He pitched us a bunch of others songs that I wish we'd done. I wish we had done

his song ["Hot Rod Lincoln"] right. I wish we hadn't of fucked up all the words the way we did. That wasn't my department. That was the old Commander. We didn't even get the chords right much less the words.

**KB: I asked Charlie Ryan if he liked your version and he said he did, that you guys had done it different, but he liked it. He said mainly, "I liked them checks."**

BK: (Laughs.) I'm sure we gave him a warm feeling in his wallet. He's a gentleman about it. We had really heard the Johnny Bond version first and a friend of mine ran into Bond up in the Northwest and said, "I'm buddies with Commander Cody and those guys." Johnny Bond looked at him and said, "Oh yeah? I hate 'em." I still love Johnny Bond though, it doesn't matter what he said.

**KB: Some artists have told me that having a really big hit record ruined the flow of their career. Was that the case with the Cody band?**

BK: Luckily we didn't have any flow yet. But I know from whereof they speak. We made an effort at one point to make a big successful L.A. sounding kind of record - it was called Commander Cody & His Lost Planet Airmen and it was produced by John Boylan. This guy was a great producer and I think he was Linda Ronstadt's boyfriend at the time. I think he had something to do with assembling the Eagles when they were her backup band. He was a good guy and good producer, but it just wasn't enough, we lost the page on that. Not really because of him or that record, but that was indicative of the fact that we were starting to lash about like a

wounded snake trying to figure out what to do. So, I can see how a hit single could really upset the apple cart. I remember George got pissed off and wouldn't sing "Hot Rod Lincoln" for a while at gigs.

**KB: Was there a sense of panic that you guys weren't being successful enough?**

BK: That's the funny thing. There were a lot of factors at work. We had an 8-piece band with four roadies. Twelve people on the road. An office with a manager and a couple of secretaries and God knows what else. There was a lot of money hemorrhaging going on. It was just one of those classic business models where the expenditures expand to fit the available money. We were at that middle ground and we weren't making the big bucks. We weren't selling millions of records, we were selling a hundred thousand records. Of course, if I had a hundred thousand selling record right now, I'd be dancing and have a big hat made that says, "Hey, I sold a hundred thousand records." At the time, we were measuring our success against the big pop people we were second on the bill to, and we were disappointed.

**KB: Were you more of a show band than a recording act?**

BK: We were not a good record act, I don't think. We did not know how to make records, when you boil it all down. Our best records were live ones because that's what we did best. We were a dynamic live show. When we did try to make records, we didn't have enough direction. For whatever reason,

it didn't work, we didn't achieve our goals. So, we tried to sell out, but nobody was buying.

**KB: With eight people on stage, once you divvy up the proceeds from a night's work, it's not much is it?**

BK: No, it's not much. We had twelve people and then it expanded so there was at least a 15-person crew, which is OK if it's Elvis' TCB army, but the pie wasn't that big. So, we were able to make working man money. Once, I remember Cameron Crowe interviewed Billy C., and he got Billy C. to say, "Man, we don't make as much money as the garbage man." Everybody thought we were big stars.

So anybody who cared was appalled to read in Rolling Stone that Commander Cody made not quite as much money per person as the garbage man. We may have had more fun though.

**KB: That's what I wanted to ask, what went right with the band?**

BK: Everything went right with the band. You'll find me to be extremely not bitter about this whole thing. I don't feel juked or under appreciated. I think there's more to be appreciated about that band than many people know, but that doesn't bother me. I think that we achieved every measure of success that we could have expected and more given that we were self-destructive. Way too loaded! Just on booze, pot, and cocaine and various flirtations with pill stuff, we were just way too loaded. I can testify that shit will turn on you like a pit bull. It turned on me. But, we just had a tremendous time gallivanting around the country in this

bus with 12 bunks and a lower lounge for drinking and card playing, and an upper lounge for toking and listening to jazz. It was a model that worked great for a while. One thing you really can't ignore in this story I think is that I was really too loaded for my own good. I can only speak for myself here, but when I look back, I know that. It's hard to not think that was a primary cause of problems that existed in my life, including my ability to help the band move forward, be creative, and good. I probably wasn't the only one. I feel obliged to mention that because of the band's legacy.

"Down to Seeds & Stems Again," "Lost in the Ozone," "Too Much Fun," I sense a theme has developed here. I don't even want to go so far as to say it was a mistake. All I know is that the very same things that liberated me and opened me up to my abilities to do some of this stuff also became my jailer.

**KB: Since you're still with us and delightfully cogent, may I assume you've quit that stuff?**

BK: Oh yeah. I had to quit everything about eighteen-and-a-half years ago. I was not the guy that could do a couple of glasses of wine and say, "Oh no, no more for me thank you." That wasn't me.

**KB: Yet you still play mostly in bars.**

BK: I do. I had to come to terms with that early or get a new career. The best way I can describe it is: I don't have a big beef with booze. I have a big beef with booze and me. I know some people can have a couple glasses of wine.

I don't want a couple glasses of wine. I used to like 20.

**KB: Because of your experiences with booze, you feel that you have a knack for dealing with audience members who have been over-served?**

BK: (Laughs.) I like that phrase. It's never the customer's fault. I try to remember things that I've learned, but sometimes I've suffered drunks very poorly, which I don't want to do. When people come up to me, they'll see that I'm not drinking, and through that I've been able to carry the message to some people. If there's someone who's having a problem I like to be able to say, "There's hope for you, man. If you're tired of drinking or taking drugs, there's shit you can do about it." But I did have to tap into something other than my own smarts to quit, because my own smarts were getting me fucked up.

**KB: Was there a particular incident that precipitated the break-up of Commander Cody?**

BK: Not really. There was maybe an incident, but it was a long time coming.

The band started to flounder and put out that record that wasn't real well received. We had to go to Europe and deliver one more record. We were going to make a live record in Europe and John Tichy decided at that point to get off-board. He left. In the middle of the record, Billy C. bailed and went home and said, "Screw this." I ended up being the point man and we had Norton Buffalo on board then to cover for the missing people, and that was the end. By the time we came home, things were just in shambles. But I don't really think that was the cause - it had run its

course and it was the death throes to go there and crank out one more record. It was just a general erosion.

**KB: Can you deal with any of your former band mates today?**

BK: Oh, I talk to all of them! We did a reunion at the Prairie Home Companion two years ago and it was fun. Andy Stein, the fiddle player, has a regular job on that so he kind of got us through the door. We did two shows in Ann Arbor – we did like four shows altogether. John Tichy and I were talking and John is like at the top of his game now. He's the head of the Mechanical and Aeronautical Engineering Division at RPI in New York. He rejoined the band in California, but he had a doctorate in his pocket during the whole hey day of the band. He and I were talking and he said, "Bill, what are we going to call this tour?" I said, "I know what we should call this tour: The Nobody's Dead Yet Tour."

**KB: Were the members of the Cody band pissed off because Asleep At The Wheel came along and snatched up their audience?**

BK: No. I'm not pissed. Some people might be, but I'm not because we abdicated our audience. They didn't really get popular until after we were gone. They also concentrated more on country, we were more broad based. They put out their versions of "Too Much Fun," "Smoke That Cigarette," and "Hot Rod Lincoln" way later, after we were gone. I just noticed something. In the last four years, I have played on stage with every single member of Commander Cody. Once or twice a year I'll do a show with Cody – sometimes I'll function as his band or we'll have both of our bands together. John Tichy I play whenever I can up in his woods. Cody and Tichy brought me in as special guest at the big National Parks for the Performing Arts at Wolf Trap. Bobby Black is on Tied to the Wheel and I've used him on gigs in Northern California. I just did a tour with Audie De Lone, my friend for the Moonlighter's days who re-introduced me to Nick Lowe. I brought Billy C. Farlow on board to do a series

of gigs, and I did a private party with Andy Stein. So, I've played live with everyone of those people.

**KB: You also did the "Hot Rod Lincoln Live" LP for Hightone.**

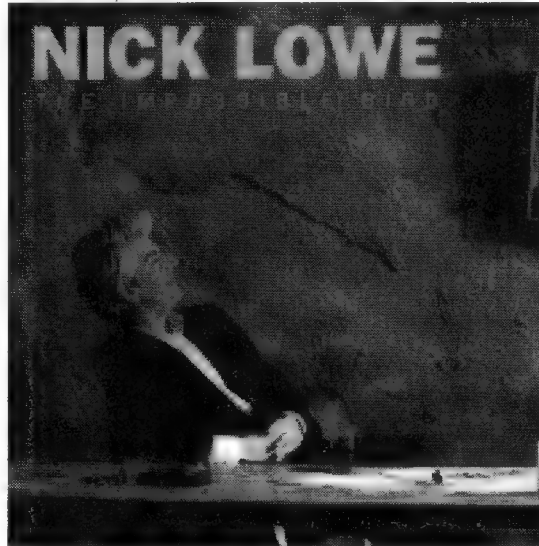
BK: That's right, where I did that medley of the Lincoln thing. I started playing again and people started asking me for the Cody hit and I didn't know the words. Then, that series of imitations sort of grew organically, like where I play that intro to "Folsom Prison Blues," just to crack up the band and said, "Johnny Cash passed me by." So, once we started including those things, it was kind of off to the races and we started adding little things to it on stage. Turning it into a showpiece.

Now it's turned into our big Wayne Newton climax. People always love it and want to hear it. It's a double-edged thing. One, it was a song I was associated with from the day. Secondly, it's just a good cheap trick doing all those imitations.

**KB: Tell us how you ended up doing the Moonlighters with Nick Lowe.**

BK: We started out literally moonlighting from Cody. We backed up Lily Tomlin, she had a character developed that sprang out of the movie Nashville. The band progressed

from a 7-piece western swing band – we put out one album on the Amherst label – then me and the drummer stuck with it and began working with Audie De Lone and turning it into a 4-piece skinny tie band. Audie De Lone was credited along with his band Eggs Over Easy, with starting the British Pub Rock movement. All those English guys basically nod to them as the first Pub Rock band. They would do whatever they felt like, modern and old all mixed up in their own way and that was news to all those people. So Nick and Brinsley Schwartz started coming down to see them. Anyway, I'm in a band in Marin County, California with Audie De Lone, and I had met Nick Lowe years before. Audie sends him a letter or a tape, Nick sends an audio letter back with the salutation, "Dear Hero of Mine." Basically he said, "There's not many of us left,



## Interview with bill kirchen

come on over and I'll produce your record.." We sent him a tape because we wanted Rockpile to do the songs. Unbeknownst to us, Rockpile had broken up. So, we raised the money to get us to England and to pay the studio tab and we made this Moonlighters' record. We had a grand old time. He was with Carlene at the time and we basically just lived with the cat for a month there and pretty much bonded with him. This would've been in the early 80s. When that got done, I sort of stayed in touch with him and got myself on The Party of One, his last Warner Brothers record, which he cut before Little Village, but came out afterwards.

Then, I was in England working with my band and he came out to see us and I got hired on as his guitar player. He was going to make the record that turned out to be The Impossible Bird, he wanted to tour and record with the same band.

I just loved that. Through him I met Elvis Costello, did a BBC radio show. A couple of years ago during the dot com hey day, Ask Jeeves had a big party and they hire Elvis and there was Jim Keltner on drums, Nick Lowe on bass, Audie De Lone – so I coat tailed on to that gig.

**KB: Do you have any trouble understanding these English cats with the thick accents?**

BK: The worst ones I thought were in Newcastle, the Geordies, I could hardly understand them. Then you get up to Scotland and it's a little bit better but still kind of inscrutable. The guys in the band tended to be from London, but I could pretty well understand them, But it is different. Sometimes I'd be sitting on the bus thinking, "How the hell did I get here? I'm the token yank in a giant rollicking sea of tea bags." I'm kind of an Anglophile, I love that stuff. I grew up with a lot of English culture and I was mad for the whole English thing. My biggest thing was that after being in England for a while, I'd have to stop myself from having English affectations. That's my favorite thing about being a musician, all the people you get to meet all over the place.

**KB: How did you make the transition to solo career?**

BK: Ken, I've always been just a downstream guy. I'll wake up and say, "Hang on, I've been doing this for twelve years. Apparently, this is what I do."

The same thing happened with that. I moved out to the East

Coast and I was back managing Cody, unless that's an oxymoron. I liken it to herding cats. I got out of that and ended up importing bicycles for Jake Riviera, and then playing with a five night a week country band in Baltimore for a year. Then, I just started playing with the people in town. Next thing I knew I've got a band and we've got this residency in a club, I'm still there every Thursday night when I not out of town.

**KB: Dom Salemi wanted to know why you hold court in a tiny club in Annandale when you could make big bucks elsewhere.**

BK: Well, I'd like people to think I could make big bucks that night elsewhere, but you can't work every Thursday night for big bucks and I'm glad to have a tiny gig. It's like our home. A whole kind of scene has grown around it. We play a party every year whose common ground are groups of people who have met at that place to see us. By now there's all these kids running all over the lawn, and it's great to play this party in the summer and these couples that you've met there have all these kids so we can say, "Ah, all these kids were conceived early Friday morning." There's some sense of community there. It used to be sort of a biker bar but the night I'm there we make it no smoking because I've been having some lung issues. Which is no small task in Virginia, land of the tobacco clan. It's real cosmopolitan, there's people from all walks of life. There are professors from Georgetown, bikers, blue collar workers, just everybody and it's a real nice scene where we can play anything we want. We'll learn songs on stage and we'll say, "OK, this set is all songs we don't know."

We try to play good and in a way, we think it's our finest scene. I'd almost like people to think I'm slumming when I do it, but it's part of my income and a fairly substantial part of it.

**KB: Bill, you were raised in Ann Arbor where the atmosphere is pretty liberal. Is it tough living in the D.C. area with all this nonsense going on now?**

BK: Yeah it is. I'm fairly vocal about it so don't get me started. I often wonder if living in D.C. has made me more politicized. From my perspective, the government got hijacked. It was a coup. That's my personal view and I may have a simplistic bleeding heart liberal view of this whole thing, but I think it has all gone horribly wrong. Ann Arbor was a nice liberal

enclave, but there's this fairly big block of religious fundamentalists out there who you shouldn't even waste your time talking to because they won't listen or respond rationally.

**KB: Dom also wanted to know – why the Telecaster?**

BK: I got into it early on. I discovered it early on through Don Rich's work with Buck Owens, Owens himself, James Burton with Ricky Nelson and Elvis Presley, Roy Nichols with Merle Haggard. Soon, I discovered that all those guys played it, so I wanted to get a Tele and I got a real good one. I've had the same Tele for a third of a century. Part of it is just laziness. Another part is, I really like the twang and the low end stuff best on a Tele. I get dizzy above the fifth fret and a nosebleed above the twelfth.

**KB: What about the Talos amp?**

BK: Oh, that's an amp these guys are making in Springfield, it's really cool. I've always been a Fender amp guy but these guys are making an amp that's so cool it's weaning me away from my old Fender. It's really a versatile amp.

They're using high-end Hi-Fi technology – hand-wired with a simple circuit that doesn't degrade the signal. You get a lot of what the guitar sounds like through it and it has three different power settings. Very simple controls, two gain

and volume controls and a couple of bright switches. It's not like any other amp I've heard.

**KB: Is it a tube amp?**



BK: It sure is. The Holy Grail for me is a Fender Deluxe that I love and this to me is the first amp that sounds like that and more.

**KB: Fender has made some transistor amps, have you tried them?**

BK: I really am more of a tube guy. I've never been happy with a solid state amp, although I've played some that were OK. That's kind of a different theory and I'm not geared up for that. I love the sound of tubes overloading a little bit. I've lectured places about that weird change in technology. They're making good Russian and Chinese tubes now and if you go to Magic Parts.com they sell those.

**KB: You did some of your best solo work with Hightone, which has cut its**

**roster to the bone lately.**

BK: Yeah. Everybody else in the record business, they need to reinvent themselves somehow, and it's more difficult for Hightone because they don't have the deep pockets of the bigger labels.

**KB: Did you receive any creative edicts from either Black Top or Hightone?**

BK: The way I did it, I intentionally told both Black Top and Hightone that I would be delivering an album and they never tried to tell me what to do.

I've been at it long enough that they just let me grunt. They'd give me some money and I'd give them a record, then they'd give me the rest of the money.

That's how it worked. I've had to kick in a little extra money occasionally, I tend to overspend a bit in the studio. I'll clutch in there and spend a whole day doing something that should have taken me a half an hour. Sometimes I'm efficient, sometimes I'm just the worst. Like they say, any work like this, you don't finish it – you abandon it. I also try to surround myself with people who are good at what they do. My rhythm section are very wonderful people and players, and they just play their asses off. They can get that stuff done fast, Usually the slowness is me.

**KB: What has been the most gratifying change you've experienced from playing as part of a well-known group and being a solo act?**

BK: One thing is the fact that I have to be conscious of the business end of things. The good side of that is that it's a tangible thing to me. This band gets built one fan at a time. Every single per-



son who gets on the mailing list helps a little bit. That's great because before I was so insulated from all that and whatever successes and triumphs you had on the road, a long time elapsed before it hit your pocket - if ever. Now, I'm involved with every aspect and I love that. I can't sit around whining about someone else, it's all on me.

That's a good feeling. Even working with Nick Lowe - I can't imagine a nicer guy to work for, and he paid us well. He paid way more out than he made in on his tour because he had a hit song on *The Bodyguard* movie, "What's So Funny About Peace, Love and Understanding," which sold 30 million copies worldwide. So, Nick made a nice chunk of change there. But even paid well with the beautiful, soulful Nick Lowe, I still wished I was at home with my own band sometimes.

**KB: What has been your most memorable encounter with a fan in recent times?**

I just got a great e-mail from some guy who just went on and on and he said a bunch of funny things like, "I used to sing along with the Cody records.

About four years ago, I decided to get a guitar and start singing them. I couldn't believe it, all the songs were I, IV, V." then he said, "I think you guys invented trucker chic!" Which he spelled s-h-e-i-k. "In tenth grade I drew a truck off your second album and they hung it in an art show." That's just the last and that wasn't even a personal encounter, just an e-mail. But that kind of typifies what's so cool. You just plug along doing what

you do and every now and then you run into someone who is genuinely excited and has bought the whole program. I say, "I know what you mean. I'm fired up about this shit too."

**KB: Tell us about your latest album.**

BK: We put out a record on the Cracker Barrel label. This guy, Joe Wilson from the National Council for Traditional Arts, he puts on folk festivals around the country. He put together a show with Shirley Caesar, the Sons of Hawaii, Tito Puente, Ernie K-Doe, Ralph Stanley, and us. He convinced the Cracker Barrel to "update their tonalities," to borrow a phrase (laughs), or actually down-date their tonalities and put together an Americana series of cool music.

There's a fifteen CD series and we've got one of 'em. This guy became enamored with my phrase Dieselbilly, being as how I invented the genre I could play anything I wanted. So they called it Dieselbilly Road Trip, and I covered a lot of place name songs. "8 More Miles to Louisville," "Streets of Baltimore," "Pittsburgh Steelers," "Hollywood City," and "Midnight Memphis." It's all covers save for one song I wrote with Joe Wilson, the curator of this project. A few instrumentals because they wanted those. I did "Sleepwalk," "Guitar Boogie Shuffle," and "Buckaroo."

**KB: Is the Cracker Barrel label and the restaurant chain one and the same?**

BK: One in the same. Joe went into some of the Cracker Barrel restaurants and there's a whole gift shop that you've got to hang around while you

wait for a table. There's tavern puzzles and Cabbage Patch Dolls, but they also have records stacked there too. But Joe noticed that a lot of it was anonymous fake Irish music being played on the hammer dulcimer, so he persuaded them to upgrade their music series. So, he convinced them to put this series of Americana records in their Cracker Barrels and I've got one of their records.

**KB: What's the word been like on the new album?**

BK: People really like it. I wouldn't be surprised if this business model for selling records is better than the one I've been using in the independent record business. It's too early to tell right now, they don't even have them in all the stores yet and Cracker Barrel is new to being a record retailer, so there's some fits and starts. I have high hopes though. Those records that they put together and Starbucks, those are huge sellers. It's a new era out there.

**KB: Are you happy about that or would you prefer the old way where the record company put it out and promoted it?**

BK: I'm up for anything. I never saw a dime out of that stuff and there's a million old Cody records kicking around that I never see any money at all.

**KB: Never?**

BK: Never ever. One problem is, if I were going to go for it, that there's such a big split that the figures aren't that important and I don't have enough time to chase it down as a matter of pride.

**KB: Has your solo material received any Americana air play?**

BK: Oh yeah. But that and \$2.98 will get you a small latte. The Americana charts is great and I'm always on that but it's really not a formidable force. Where I tend to hear myself most is on the music channel on satellite TV.


That's another thing I'm very conflicted about. Here in D.C., I'm on the Board of Directors for NARAS. They're not as bad as RIAA, but they're all up in arms about Napster. Understandably. My problem is that Napster does nothing but help me. I have definitely indirectly benefitted from people who have been hurt by pirating, and I've also been screwed by those people a lot. For me, the record is a calling card. It increases my visibility. I've made far more money as a record retailer selling my records off the stage than I have as a recording artist getting royalties and Napster doesn't seem to impact that. People still seem to want to interact with me, shoot the breeze, and tell me about the time they passed out at a Cody show in '73 while I sign a record. That's fine. That's how it works for me. So Napster helps me, so I have very mixed feelings about that.

**KB: How has country music changed your life?**

BK: Country music in the broad sense of the word – country music, western swing, rockabilly, allowed me to be a professional musician. That's had the profoundest effect on my life and that's just what I've done. It's my vocation, my advocacy, and my social life. It's also been the horse I rode on my descent into alcoholism and it was the same horse I rode coming back out of it. It's just been there, it's been my whole thing. I don't want to sound too precious here but I do know, there are certain kinds of country songs that are important for me to sing. I don't really know why, but they tend to be songs with a tragic spin to them. For some reason, the sadder they are, the better I like 'em and they cover themes that I really

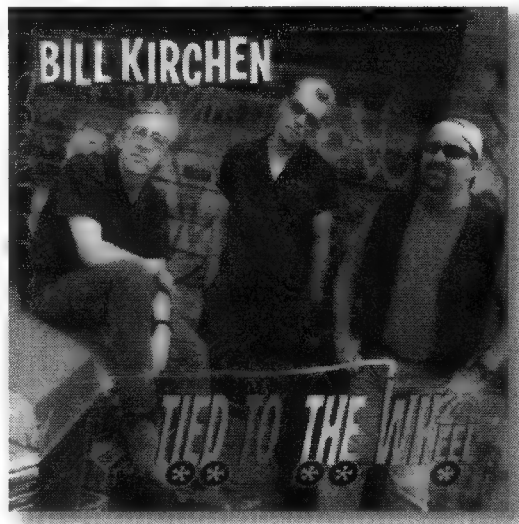
wasn't getting from pop music. I also have a propensity towards doing the surreal or metaphysical type songs. There's something about singing a good song that does something for me, and I don't know how it changed my life, but it must have because I feel driven to do it. I met my wife a third of a century ago and we've been married 30 years and we have an 18-year old daughter. When she was younger she hated country music. If I was driving around and the windows were down while country music was on, she'd have to hide below the window levels so she wouldn't be seen. Now she's learn-

ing "Man of Constant Sorrow" off the Oh Brother, Where Art Thou soundtrack.

It's a beautiful thing. It's been the big river that's run through my family life. My wife writes songs, she wrote most of the songs on "Raise A Ruckus," She also runs the business out of the house, so it's central to my life. If you catch me whining about anything just slap me. 

Folks, check out Kirchen's website at [www.billkirchen.com](http://www.billkirchen.com) for all the latest

on this essential roots artist. If you're in a Cracker Barrel restaurant, look for his new disc. You won't regret it. Or, write to: Bill Kirchen, Box 525, Owings, Md 20736



Despite being one of the longest running and most prolific old school punk bands plying their trade, The Boils have seen dozens of much less talented groups climb past them to the top of the popular music slag heap. This is, to our way of thinking, not only an outrage, but a puzzlement as well. Despite this and a turnover rate that would have had most people throwing in the towel, founder and guiding light, Greg Boil, has kept the faith. Now with his and his mates' latest disc, the brilliant and impassioned, *Pride and Persecution*, The Boils appear ready to make their mark on what has become a staid and rather conservative musical scene. We caught up with Greg in the middle of a hectic touring schedule and he somehow managed to find the time to graciously answer our silly, uninformed questions.

come together cohesively as our own "brand." And I think that the grip we have gotten on that would be the key to any possible way that we would stand out within the "genre" so to speak. If you can find that signature, so that when your turn comes on in the punk mix being played in the car everyone knows what band it is, then I guess you have managed to stand out among the pack.

**Brutarian: What's the deal with "street cred" as concerns punk bands? During the first wave of punk, no one asked whether Richard Hell or Joe Strummer had "street cred." We knew that both Richard and Joe were literate, middle-class kids, but so were we. And none of it mattered, we liked the music and didn't give a damn about street smarts.**

Greg: Yeah, I see what you're saying there. The only time I ever hear a

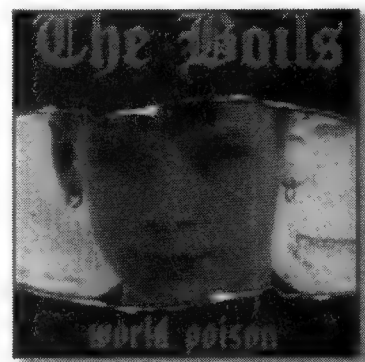
## WE LANCE

# The

**Brutarian: There are so many bands assaying the "old school" punk style, tell us why you think The Boils stand out.**

Greg: Well, I don't know if I would be so bold as to claim we "stand out" amongst any of our fellow punk rock peers who are locked into that signature "old school" style. I don't even think of things in terms of different schools, you know? It's just kinda punk rock to me. And, as far as what we do as a band, we just do what comes naturally to us. So I guess that old school flavor is flowing through our veins; we just can't help it. I think we found ourselves more on this new record, in terms of coming to grips with the street punk type influences, and the older hardcore influences, and how to make all that

band talk about "street cred" is when they obviously just don't have any. Or they've hopelessly lost touch with the street, i.e., reality. Sometimes you'll see bands on bigger punk labels in America do a split release or something with another, much smaller band, to improve their "street cred." In other words, kids aren't buying their shit as a hot topic, so the labels are trying to figure out how to make the band hip to young kids again. All names aside, I actually had a guy in a band on Epitaph tell me once that Brett (Gueritz) wanted them to do a split with a smaller, street punk band to "improve our street cred." I couldn't believe he actually let that cat out of the bag, like it wasn't anything at all! So clueless, man. They





# Boils,

## BUT IN A GOOD WAY

interview by Dom Salemi

obviously weren't selling records and it was time to take evasive action. So, I don't know, I don't ever really think about the "street cred" thing. I like what I like. The bands, their records, and all the shit I'm into stems from so many different backgrounds in terms of both class and economic status. I'm always really fascinated to find out what someone in a band that I'm a fan of does for a living. And I think I've been lucky to come in touch with so many honest and sincere song writers and performers whom I consider to be in bands that kids twenty years from now will wish they could have seen. And it doesn't matter if they're broke or make a good

living; if what they are doing as a band is true and inspirational, that's all the "street cred" I need.

**Brutarian: Your band has led a kind of tortured, complicated life. Fill us in on some of this and tell us what keeps you going. It's obviously not the money, as so few bands actually make any.**

Greg: Wow, you make it sound so very dramatic! Like an odyssey...I appreciate that. We could fill up a few hours on one of those Behind the Music deals. Well, anyway, tortured and complicated is a very good way to put it. Money sucks, the band has totally made me broke and fucked me out of credit cards

and the like. There is no money. I love when some kids act shocked that I have a day job. I'm very flattered that they think this is such a huge operation that t-shirt revenue could be paying my rent. But as you know, that's unfortunately not the case. And now, we just have to learn as we go along. We will always lose money on tour; I'm sure of it by now. So we just try to pace it and be as smart as we can be about when and where we go so we don't totally fuck ourselves. The Ozymoron tour was a pretty bad fucking thing....for everyone involved. These things just have a way of going "kerplunk," and before you know it, you're on Bourbon Street in

New Orleans borrowing money from your German friends because the ATM receipt just gave you goose eggs across the board. But I do it because, except for the money, and except for practicing, I love it. I love everything about going into different cities. I love everything about playing my hometown and hanging with friends for a whole night. I love everything about a box showing up at the door with 100 new CDs that are testament to the fruits of our labor.

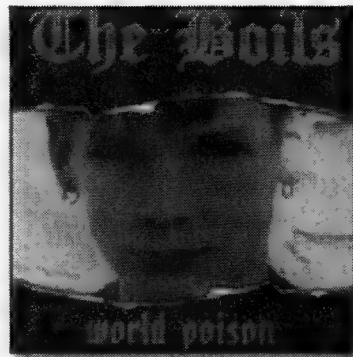
Yes, it is a total pain in the ass to lose members. It totally sucks when someone runs out of steam, gets that new job that just won't bend, runs into a wall with school, gets married and runs out of time. Or, just burns out on it all. It totally sucks when that happens. But you pick up and soldier through it, and hope for the best. Sometimes I get a little stressed out with things, but I love that this is a huge part of my life.

**Brutarian: Lots of comps and singles, but few long-playing CDs, why is this?**

Greg: Because, despite what some people say, we're SMART! Ha! Seriously, though, we have had offers in the past to release full lengths long before we ever did one. But I always felt it was never the right time. In fact, looking back at our first full length, I STILL feel like it wasn't the right time back then! But *Pride and Persecution*, I feel like is a good definition of who we are, so I feel really good about having that as a full length. And after having done it, I feel good about doing the next one as well. Otherwise, we have enjoyed writing songs in small doses, and have really enjoyed working with different labels and bands on smaller projects. It's really hot to be able to have formed a relationship with bands like *Disorderly Conduct*, *The Stagers*, *Last Target*, *The Goons*, *Brigatte Rosse*, and *Violent Society*. And to have shared records with them. So we really get off on that stuff. And there's more coming, I know a split with *The Hawks from Osaka*, Japan, is in the works.

**Brutarian: Three long players, bring us up to snuff on how your sound has evolved over the course of these three full length works.**

Greg: Damn, Dom, you know what's shakin! Ok, well, the



first one was *When The Sun Goes Down*, which was more of an EP kinda thing at 8 songs, but we'll count it as one of the full lengths for sake of argument. Also, a reissue of it just came out, and with a bunch of add add-ons and stuff it's now a lot longer. So, yeah. Ok, well, that record had some of the very first songs we wrote, "Victims" and "Crawl"...I can listen to it ok. I think the first four songs were pretty strong, "Time To Strike,"

"Last Stand," "When the Sun goes Down," and "Crock of Shit." We still play them a lot, so I guess that's a good sign that they were all right. For a first effort, I think it was all right; however, we had lost site of shorter, really really fast songs that had been on different seven inches and stuff. There was a side of the band's songwriting that leaned very heavily on oi/street punk type roots. And, there was another side that leaned towards the hardcore, Agnostic Front influence. And I think we had NO IDEA how to effectively have the two worlds flow through a record. I think very few bands can pull that off, the Dropkick Murphys are a band that I think CAN. But on *When The Sun Goes Down*, we were a long way from figuring that out, and on *World Poison*, our first "full length," the concept evaded us as well! While there was a mesh of fast songs, like "Assassin" and "What About You," there were also the more oi-ish type tunes like "It Won't Stop" and "The Price." And although some of those songs are staples in our live set, I don't think we really brought the two worlds together so well on *World Poison*. I think it was a necessary growing experience for me and the band in terms of songwriting, but I don't think we comfortably brought it all together until *Pride and Persecution*. I'm not saying we made a fuckin' masterpiece here! I'm just sayin' that there was, I think, a certain objective that we didn't even necessarily know we had until we stumbled onto it when putting the finishing song writing touches on *Pride*. Then it kind of became apparent to us what was missing on *World Poison*. I think this is why we feel that *Pride* is a stronger, more confident release than our previous engagements.

**Brutarian: We've noted especially on the latest CD that there is a real commitment to melody, an ingredient in**



**short supply on most harder-style punk works. Another glaring weakness, for most old school bands, are the vocals. This is why we like The Boils so much. The vocals show that one can declaim, even shout, but you can modulate the tone and texture so as to add drama, passion and yes, even tenderness.**

Greg: Well, that's really rad to hear that! Believe me, it was a struggle to get to that point where I felt comfortable trying to approach things in a different way on *Pride*. I hate when bands just growl all the time, I mean, for some types of punk rock it works, but you're right. For our type of music, varying vocals can really help convey so much more in terms of feeling and emotion than to just cop out and growl all the time. *World Poison* was a vocal nightmare when we recorded that. There wasn't much of a variety of vocals on it, due largely to the fact that, not only was I still searching for my identity as a "singer" (note quotes!) but I had no idea what else could be done because I was smoking a pack a day. Oh, that FUCKED me. I smoked hardcore for about 5 years or so, and it just killed me. I couldn't do different things, when it was shitty out I was susceptible to getting sick, and I felt like ass waking up every day with green shit in me throat. So whatever came out of my mouth in the studio was what you got, cause there was just nothin else I could do. Finally, I kicked smoking (which SUCKED, trust me) but finally I kicked it and then I started to feel a little more comfortable playin around with the mic. And now, usually with a couple beers I'm nice and loosened up and feel like I can accomplish at least a LITTLE

bit more than what I was doing on *World poison* and older releases. Some of my favorite punk rock vocalists do so much more than just the growling thing. Glen from Reducers SF, Al from the Murphys, Kuma from The Hawks...I think the Hudson Falcons do some nice things vocally as well. You're very right, when you modulate this shit, you can achieve and get so much more out of it. So that is something I was striving for, and will hopefully continue to be able to grow into.

**Brutarian: Do you think music can affect change? Much of what you have to say on the new record appears not to hold to this.**

Greg: I don't know. I just write 'bout what I feel at the time, and I guess throughout the duration of the writing of this record I was more often feeling pessimistic or negative about things around me. I swear, I'm really not that much of a downer all the time. I'm a kick-in-the-ass at parties, for real! But maybe, when I was approaching things that were worth writing about, I was feeling more of a negative or cynical vibe in terms of "change" and "revolution." But with that said, I DO think music can affect change..in a round-about way. By affecting the individual listener, you know? Ain't no "all we are saying is give peace a chance" is going to just result in a harmonious unification of humanity. But songs can touch the individual and affect change within, and I guess, if one by one, the dots connect, than piece by piece, for better or for worse, that change can affect the world.

**Brutarian: Does the apparent consoli-**

**dation of entertainment industry businesses into giant conglomerates worry you?**

Greg: It's a little alarming, isn't it? I won't pretend to be the most eloquently versed voice on such issues, but yeah, I mean, there definitely comes a lack of choice for the consumer when such consolidation takes root. On a simple level, thinking about it harkens me back to the days when I was first purchasing music as a kid, getting into different things. And I remember at first, I hadn't come into contact with the independent stores in the area. I was too young to really be exploring South Street in Philadelphia, this totally kick-ass store in our area called Repo records was still unknown to me, and Angry, Young, and Poor in Lancaster was still yet to be born. I'll tell you, when the parameters of your record buying experience is more or less K-Mart and the mall, the "choice" sure is slim. All those places carry the same shit, because they are all probably owned by the same two corporations. Plus its over priced, as we all know. But luckily, I eventually came into contact with the independents in my area, and "choice" took on an entirely new definition, and eventually those big stores simply didn't have what I wanted, because the majority of what I wanted wasn't being played on "Top 40" radio. Hence, Sam Greedy doesn't carry it, because it ain't a huge seller. So I think that this is maybe a simplified version of what you're asking me, because frankly, matters of big business and such usually result in a nose bleed for me, and I end up sounding like more of an idiot than I already do. But my analogy I think is appropriate to

## interview with the boils

how, on a simple level, the lack of choice and the consolidation of big business is stifling for the consumer as far as choice and cost are concerned, and certainly has a negative impact on a mass level of popular culture.

**Brutarian: Greg, you said in a recent interview that your political views are conservative. Were you just kidding, your lyrics seem to be the work of an anarchist if anything?**

Greg: I'm definitely neither! I don't know what interview that was. Maybe it was a bad paraphrase job or something. That's why I like doing interviews over email now. There's no fucking up the voice on the recorder. Maybe I was being sarcastic? Usually I try to watch sarcasm in interviews though, as it usually doesn't translate too well over into print. Well, when asked about such political perspectives, I usually respond by saying that I probably have certain views that are maybe closer to conservative, and others that are closer to liberal. I think its safe to say that I would lean closer towards the liberal end of things, and I'm not just saying that because of who I'm talking to either. I think I just have this obsession with not coming off like I'm trying to be something that I'm not. So that's why I usually make a beeline to the nearest exit when I feel like someone wants me to tag myself as one thing or the other. I'm just me, and if I try to categorize myself in on department or the other, I'm sure I won't live up to the "expectations" of such a profile.

**Brutarian: And for a liberal, it's fascinating that you collect porn. Personally, we don't like porn which is more about the degradation of women and art. Now erotica and pin-up photography that's a horse of a different color. Agree or disagree?**

Greg: Either I got some serious loose lips or you been snoopin' under my bed! Well, you know, again, I'm just me, and I come complete with all the attributes, flaws, qualities, and imperfections that you see before you. I would never ever ever EVER try to come off like I'm some sort of punk rock uber man or some shit. There's ways in which I guess I keep pace with the punk rock "movement," and

then there's times when I guess I fall behind. But either way, I'm running at my own pace; I'm not TRYING to get ahead or lag behind the pack. All I can say is I'm most comfortable just being who I am. Yes, we could debate porn. Yes, we could debate a virtual addiction I have for professional football, basketball, hockey, and baseball games. Yes, we could debate the different diets we may have. We could debate how punk or un-punk any of these may be. It might actually be kinda fun to do over a couple beers. But again, as I've said, I would never ever try to fake anyone into thinking I'm something I'm not. This is me, what you read in my lyrics is me, what you see in the pictures on our web site is me. Its all these different ideas we all have that make our scene as beautiful and as fucked up as it really is. Fuck. JUST when you think ya got a punk rock Garden of Eden, you go to take a dump in some underbrush and, what's that? Agh...another stash of Boil's pornos.

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**Yes, we could debate the different diets we may have. We could debate how punk or un-punk any of these may be. It might actually be kinda fun to do over a couple beers.**

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**Brutarian: The song "Anthems" has us wanting to ask you whether with this administration and its apparent dedication toward making the world a safe place for Bush and his cronies you feel now more than ever "we're fucking gone now." You talk about spitting in people's faces but the media and the average American has been brainwashed to call protest of any kind "unpatriotic."**

Greg: I don't know if the average American thinks of protest as "unpatriotic." I think its HOW you protest, what you're saying. I'd LIKE to believe that we are still a levelheaded state of people where we

can all certainly agree that the differences of opinion are what, you know, make the country go round. Checking and balancing your government, and CHALLENGING it will help make it great, at least that's what I believe. But I also believe that, just as there are some ignorant flag wavers out there, so too are there ignorant people on the other side of the fence. And I was really offended by certain, not ALL, but certain protesters that I saw. I saw a sign that said "Hey terrorists, Bush is from Texas. Retaliate HERE" with an arrow pointed towards Texas. I think that's fucking disgusting. Being uninformed and ignorant is being uninformed and ignorant, whether you're waving or burning a flag. But that's America, you know? Shit, that's just the world. If we were willing to entertain different ideas, and allow them to be expressed in an intelligent and produc-

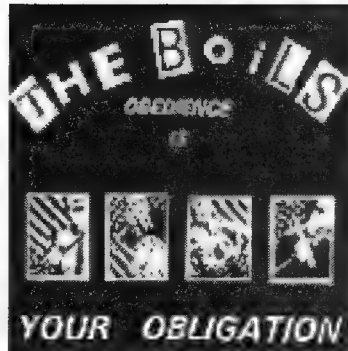
tive fashion, the world would be a friggin' utopia.

**Brutarian:** "The Dead Skin" has us satirically thinking, like H.L. Mencken, that one should respect another's religious belief only in the same sense we accept a friend's opinion that his wife is beautiful and his children brilliant.

**Greg:** It's funny, I know someone hasn't read the lyrics to that one when they ask me, "Who's the dead skinhead in 'The Dead Skin?'" That song was actually inspired by a Bible beater kind of guy who got this girl pregnant, and then skipped out of town. And I didn't want to write yet another punk rock cynical religious type song, but I couldn't resist being inspired by that situation. And when I came up with the imagery of the snake, even though it ain't rocket science, it was too much fun to play with lyrically then to pass it up.

**Brutarian:** In a number of other songs, you rail against the system, the way things are, injustice but offer no solutions. Is this because you think, at least in this country, that Republicans and Democrats have essentially come to an agreement on the fundamental issues and so now offer the voting public no real choice?

**Greg:** It's only because I look at these songs as simply expressions of emotions and such. I'm certainly not well-equipped to write songs in an equation based on problems and comparative solutions. I don't think I'm nearly sharp enough for such feats. Nor would I ever claim to be so omniscient on certain pending issues of our day that I would



feel empowered to lecture the rest of the class on it. My songs I think are mostly stories of day by day trials and crusades we embark on, or outlets of anger and frustration, or celebrations. "Stalag days" is a celebra-

tion of our old favorite Philadelphia stomping grounds, Stalag13. "One More Face" is a bit of a lashing out type of song, and "Rackham's Execution" is probably the most romantic story I've ever written, although it may not come off that way, I'm sure! No matter what type of song of writing, I try to always give it a bit of grit and a set of teeth,

because lyrics for an intense form of music like punk rock SHOULD have a level of intensity to themselves.

**Brutarian:** "Face The Rage," notwithstanding the above question, offers what appears to be violent revolution, or at the very least a manning of the barricades as a way to affect change. We too feel, in these times in AmeriKa, that violent revolution might be our last best hope to taking back the country from the military-industrial-corporate system raping and pillaging the US of A.

**So how do we educate people, how do we get them listening to inspiring, incendiary music like yours? How do we break up the information monopoly held by Time/Warner/AOL and Rupert Murdoch?**

**Greg:** I don't think there's any one way to get people to listen to a certain song or idea. We can think of different ways that we might get our music or our thoughts across to people, but you're right, it is an uphill battle when most of the public's ear is glued to the same "A List" that the radio has to offer, or the same "A list" of celebrity news or entertainment personality that the television has to offer. Plus, no matter how strongly you or I feel about something, the masses are not necessarily going to think the same way. And they might not think that way because they are too lazy too, or because they simply have weighed out the facts and ...don't agree. 🐱

### Boils' Selected Discography

#### Full Lengths

Pride And Prejudice (2001)

World Poison (1999)

When The Sun Goes Down (1998)

#### Seven Inchers

Split w/ Brigade Rozze (2002)

Split w/ Disorderly Conduct (1999)

Punk Rock Rumble w/The Goons (1999)

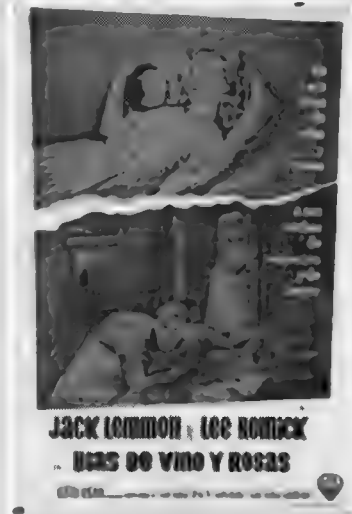
Anthems For The New Generation (1999)

Hearts Of The Oppressed (1995)

## RED HOUSE TAVERN TALES No. 7

### Here's Lookin' at You

by Christopher J. Jarmick



I had to laugh  
when that punk got into my face  
and asked me what the hell I was looking at?  
It was one of those,  
only happens in the movies moments,  
'cept it was really happening to me.

'I said I was lookin' over the fine lady  
he brought into my favorite watering hole  
and if he wanted to do more than just look at  
her  
for the next couple of weeks, he better step  
down  
and get the hell outta my face.

He asked me if I was sure about that.  
I asked him if he wanted some proof.  
He thought about that for a moment  
and when he looked away,  
I figured he was either going to swing  
or that was the end of it.

When he bought me a drink  
and apologized for being such a jerk,

I made sure my wallet was still  
in my front pant's pocket -  
been keeping it there for a long time.

Then he explains he's an actor,  
and he's got a job in some new movie.  
He's in my bar because he's doing research  
and he could use a guy like me.  
A guy like me could help him make sure  
the drunk he was playing would be authentic.

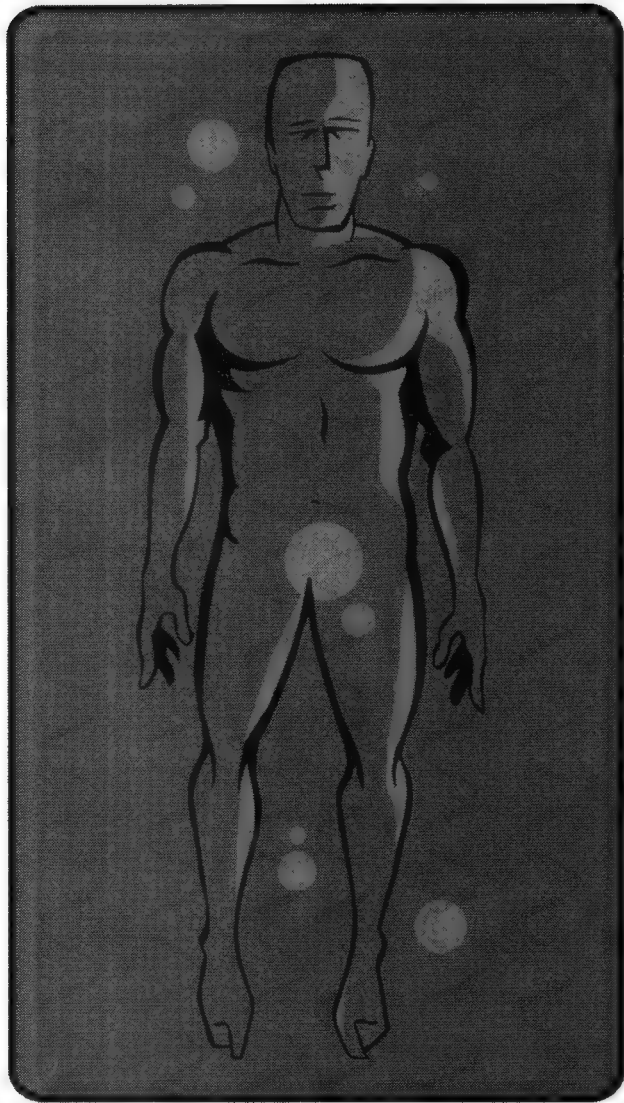
I looked him over. Recognized him.  
Then I said: "You wanna know  
what it's like to enjoy your poison so much,  
you savor the the headaches, the hunger, the  
sickness the stench,  
the cramps, the shakes, the empty hole  
that you gotta fill up with more poison?"

"Yeah, that's what I want to know,"  
he said. I smiled.  
"I dunno know, asshole," I said.  
"I don't know nobody like thata  
'cept in some stupid movie."



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# music



## AUDIO DEPRIVATION

### Alien Sex Fiend – Too Much Acid?

(Plague Records)

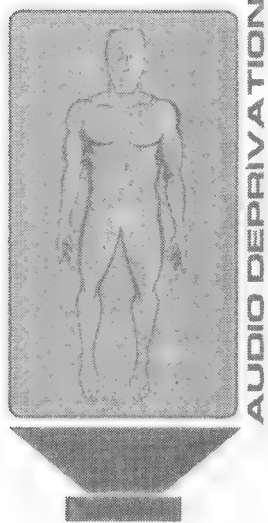
Entombed in the vault of horrible harlequenesque horror. Now envisioned a standard bearers for a movement that never was: the Benny-Hill like British Goth movement. All but forgotten today. Gone, gone under the hill – Specimen, Sex Gang Children, Field of Nephilim, et al. Not so with Nik and Mrs. Fiend. They're still lumbering about the graveyard, howling at the moon, making love among the tombstones. Which is a lovely thang, because to these misshapen ears, only Alien Sex Fiend got the monster-movie aesthetic right. Nik and his ghastly crew understood the incipient psychosis at the heart of it all and so the melodies while playfully foreboding somehow just sound damn wrong. The vocals of Fiend are theatrically sepulchral but lean more to the theatre of cruelty than the theatre of the absurd. Not a matter of "walking the line between good and evil" so much as walking the line between the living and the dead. Think of a reanimated corpse discovering he or she can make something other than lip smacking sounds of hunger. That's Nik "singing." Singing to Gothic punk – rudimentary, crepuscular melodies embalmed with fuzzy distorted guitars, mad-scientist synthesized burblings and all manner of eldritch textures and affects. And those beats, those hollow, marmoreal, beats. Thudding, metronomic, a clock ticking down to nowhere. This double LP recorded in 1989 on a European tour is a marvelously morbid introduction to the Fiendish oeuvre and while out of print, is worth seeking.

### Vernon Oxford

Vernon Oxford (Bear Family)

Yessireebob, a man so red of neck he'll have you believing 'twas he hisself who done put the "honky" in "honky tonk." We are talking high high lonesome. Not so lonesome as to cry, though, so lonesome as to die. Not feeling like a motherless child. Nope, like a blind motherless child. Ole Vern was more successful in Europe than this country but he's acquiring some cachet



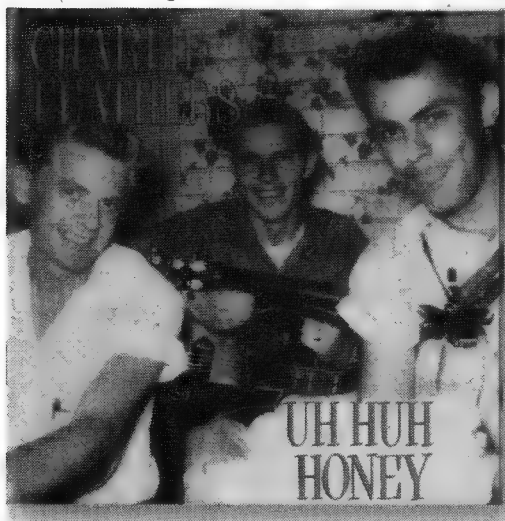


in alt. country circles thanks to this five CD set recently reissued on this German specialty label. And yes, five discs may be a bit much by way of introduction; nevertheless, this guy was the real thing. That is, he had a pedigree. Son of an Arkansas fiddler, learning to play both fiddle and guitar before turning to singing and composing classic weepy country songs. Oxford eventually wound up in Nashville sometime around '64 but this was the period when country was going pop and so the labels weren't interested in a singer patterning himself after Lefty and Hank. Even though championed by no less a peer than Harlan Howard, Vernon had only one major hit, "The Redneck National Anthem," and thus had to tour and work his ass off in Europe just to make a living wage. He's still hugely popular over there and if enough of us get the word out, perhaps the States will be someday associate the name Vern with some-one other than Jim Varney.

## Charlie Feathers

### Uh Huh Honey (Norton)

A bass, a lead guitar and a rhythm. That's all it takes to play this thing called rockabilly. At least according to ole Charlie. There's a catch



as well. "It's hard music to play." Which is probably the reason you find yourself so disappointed every time you bring home a new Just-Unearthed-From-The-Vaults-Of-Some-Obscure-Memphis-Label comp. It just ain't easy to capture that wild, raw, cornpone concupiscence. Presley couldn't do it. Not at first. It was Charlie who gave Elvis the arrangement for "Good Rockin' Tonight." Wrote his first hit, too, "I Forgot To Remember to Forget." So, if Elvis is The King, then you're not too far off base calling Feathers The King of Rockabilly. If you don't own anything of Charlie's, this may not be the place to start as it is a collection of recordings from the second phase of his career. Still, Charlie never really cut a *bad* record. Hell, there are recordings out there, near the end, when Feathers is so ill, he has to sit down for an entire performance and he nevertheless, flat out gits it. He gits most of all of it heré too, hiccuppin', growlin', stutterin', moanin', groanin', shiverin' his timbers and generally singing like someone or something from another planet. The nice folks at Norton throw in a few country numbers just to prove as Sam Phillips said – and on more than one occasion – that if Charlie had stuck to country he could've been as big as George Jones.

## Martin Gordon

### Baboon In The Basement (Radiant Future - Import)

Mr. Gordon's been making killer R&R pop music for about 3 decades now, having served as bassist/songwriter with Sparks, Jet, the Radio Stars, and the reunited John's Children, among others, in addition to doing sessions with and producing a wide variety of like-minded acts. With the exception of Sparks (who have never sounded like anyone else!), all of his bands have shared a similar formula -

loud, crunchy guitar power chords, melodic-as-Hell bass lines, pounding drums, a Beatles-ish, Cheap Trick-ish vocalist (Andy Ellison in Jet, Radio Stars & John's Children, Swede Pelle Almgren on this new effort), the occasional piano tossed into the mix, and catchy, hook-laden songs with hilarious lyrics, all produced in an in-your-face, brash, glam-like manner. On his latest CD, *Baboon In The Basement*, (for some reason, released as a solo effort, although he has a band), he tackles such subjects as the unsuccessful shoebomber on the airplane ("Terrible Mess (No-Good Shoe-bomber)"), which contains some of the worst (but funniest) rhymes ever, domestic violence ("Hit Him On The Head With A Hammer"), and bad break-ups where your really wish your ex would meet with misfortune ("Anyway Goodbye"). In addition, the band does killer covers of the Rolling Stones "We Love You," The Move's "Tonight," and a Mark Bolan song I'd never heard, "Warlord of the Royal Crocodiles." If you're a sucker for this kind of music (loud pop/punk/bubble gum/glam with titles like "Good Girls Gone Bad,") it doesn't get any better than this. Highly recommended.

*John Oliver*

## The Magic Band

**Back To The Front**  
(All Tomorrow's Parties)

At last count, there were about 40 versions of Captain Beefheart and The Magic Band from the late 60's through the mid-80's, involving 50+

musicians, I think (one could never tell with all the various aliases). As Don Van Vliet retired long ago, to paint and do whatever else he does in the desert in Arizona, allegedly refusing to even discuss the possibility of ever making music again, imagine my surprise to hear that a version of his old band would be playing at an All Tomorrow's Parties festival live event in the UK late last year. Four of his old cronies, John (Drumbo) French, Mark (Rockette Morton) Boston, Gary (Mantis) Lucas, and Denny (Feelers Reebo) Walley, for whatever reasons, decided that it was time to resurrect the good Captain's musical legacy. They got together and rehearsed for several weeks, the results of which wound up on this new CD. French doubles on drums and vocals/harp, doing a decent job of approximating Beefheart's vocals (some may call it imitating, but....is there any other way to sing these songs?). Guitarists Lucas and Walley bob and weave all over the place, as expected, and Boston holds down the bass line as he always did back in the band's 60's/70's glory days. The songs they play are primarily from *Safe As Milk*, *Trout Mask Replica*, *The Spotlight Kid* and *Clear Spot*. Beefheart music has always been an acquired taste, and it still is. . .you either love it or you just don't get it. Me - I loves it. It's great to hear new (if pretty faithful) versions of "I'm Gonna Booglarize You, Baby," "Moonlight On Vermont," "Nowadays A Woman's Gotta Hit A Man", and other classics. Buy this bad boy.

*John Oliver*

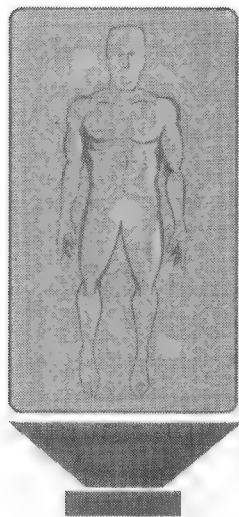
## The Misfits

**Project 1950**  
(Misfits Records/Ryko)

## Balzac

**Beyond The Darkness**  
(Misfits Records/Ryko)

The Misfits these days, much to the continuing disgust of those who subscribe to the formula that Glen Danzig = Misfits, consist of bassist and now lead vocalist Jerry Only, ex-Black Flagger Dez Cadena on guitar, and Marky Ramone on drums (I should say "Rock & Roll Hall of Famer Marky Ramone," as he appears to take great pains to point this out every chance he gets!). Mr. Only has been anxiously waiting for many years to do an album of just 50's covers...and this is finally it. The band has always had 50's-ish tendencies ("Last Caress," "American Nightmare," and "Saturday Night," for three obvious examples), so this isn't that much of a stretch. Also - I don't want to start bitching right away, but damn! - only 10 songs clocking in at about 25 minutes, and that's it? Regarding the songs themselves - bludgeoning these old classics into Misfits material works great in some cases - "This Magic Moment," "Dream Lover," and a speeded-up "Monster Mash," for 3 examples, but it doesn't for others - they do one of the worst versions of "Great Balls of Fire" I've ever heard. On the other hand, Jerry Only, while not possessing great pipes like Danzig or Michael Graves, isn't a bad singer - check out his take of "It's Only Make Believe," truly a test for any aspiring vocalist.



AUDIO DEPRIVATION

Not a bad effort at all for the Misfits, but I'd like a longer CD, please!

(NOTE: They did include a cool bonus DVD featuring live takes of 4 of the songs, plus some live performances with label mates Balzac).

Also released on the new Misfits label is the American debut of Japanese 'ghoul-rockers Balzac, and it's a compilation of most of their best songs from their 4-5 previous CDs. The guys in Balzac openly wear their Misfits influences, down to the skeleton suits they wear for live shows, familiar sounding (to Misfits fans) songs, and tons of "whoa" backing vocals. On the one hand, it's kinda hard to take them seriously due to their Misfits jones. . . on the other hand, they write some hellaciously catchy tunes and are an extremely tight band. Also, they don't take several years between albums, only to spit out ten songs clocking in at less than a half hour!

(NOTE: As in the case of the new Misfits CD, there's a bonus cool DVD, featuring Balzac videos and live performances.) Recommended for Misfits/Danzig/Sambain/Mourning Noise/etc. fans.

John Oliver

from their debut eponymous LP ("1969," "Now I Wanna Be Your Dog," "Real Cool Time," and "No Fun"), 6 from Funhouse ("Loose," "Down On The Street," "TV Eye," "Dirt," "1970," and "Funhouse"), and, surprisingly, none from Raw Power – although this is the James Williamson-less, original lineup reunited, sans the late Dave Alexander. Ron Asheton's on mindfuck guitar, brother Scott on drums, sub Mike Watt on bass, and the greatest front man in the history of Rock & Roll, James Osterberg, on vocals. If not the greatest, probably the most influential R&R band excluding the Beatles. This is the motherlode — ten ungodly loud, mindless, idiotic, noisy, moronic and classically great songs clearly recorded in front of a screeching crowd. God, I love it! If I sneak out of work within the next hour or two, I might be able to still make it to NY in time. . .and I might be able to miss the opening act, Sonic Youth. . . an additional bonus! P.S. Who in God's name had the fucking nerve to bill Iggy & the boys third in the ads for this California show?, and...behind the fucking White Stripes and Red Hot Chili Peppers, no less?

John Oliver

## The Stooges

**Reunion Show, Coachella Music & Arts Festival, 4/27/03 (Bootleg)**

I curse myself as I type this. . .because later tonight (early August), the reunited Stooges will be playing their second show (and only East Coast appearance) at Jones Beach in Wantagh, NY, about 30-35 miles from Manhattan...and I'm not going! And believe me, I'd gladly drive the 5 to 6 hours to see them. But enough of my stupidity; I digress. A few days ago, I got a copy of a bootleg of their first show, in April in Indio, CA, at the Coachella Music & Arts Festival. 10 songs - 4

## Supersuckers

**Motherfuckers Be Trippin' (Mid-Fi)**

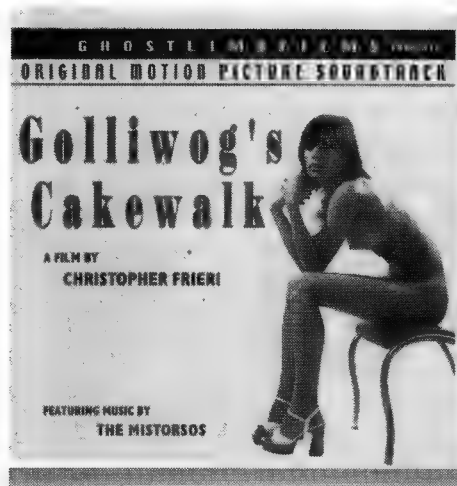
Let's cut to the chase here, shall we? The Supersuckers are one of the greatest rock & roll bands over the past 10 years, and they've even put out a couple of decent C&W CDs. As much as I'm dying to say this new one, Motherfuckers Be Trippin', will rock you sideways and change your life forever, I can't. This is just a so-so release by these guys. When I first heard it, I thought – "This sounds like a band trying their damndest to sound like The Supersuckers, only without the originality or

songwriting chops." Now, even their lesser efforts generally put most other rockers to shame. .but I've come to expect more from these guys, after the likes of The Evil Powers of Rock & Roll, The Sacrificious Sounds, and La Mano Cornada. And it's a shame, because they came up with such a great name and artwork for this new one (the name swiped from New Bomb Turks singer Eric Davidson, who used to introduce new songs in their live set as "coming from our new album, Motherfuckers Be Trippin'"), along with the usual brutal-sounding song titles ("Rock & Roll Records [Ain't Sellin' This Year]," "Rock Your Ass," "Pretty Fucked Up," "Damn My Soul," "Someday I Will Kill You," etc.) Sorry, but it appears Eddie Spaghetti & Co. just phoned this one in.

## Golliwog's Cakewalk

### Mistorsos (Ghost Limb)

We have not been allowed to pierce the veil and discern just who or what is behind these delightful excursions into space age bachelor pad muzak. Certainly, we can hear influences – Satie, Ellington, Esquivel, the incidental caprices of the strip club and the carnival midway, the slightly louche drinking establishment in questionable districts. And perhaps, this is all we need to know. Still, our hats are off to a composer, diffident as he or she appears to be, who takes the frivolous, the inconsequential and invests it with such a subtle air of unease, even, at times, of dread.



## The Swinging Blue Jeans

### Live In Sweden (2003) (no label)

Known primarily for their early 60's Merseybeat hit, a cover of Chan Romero's "Hippy Hippy Shake," the Liverpool-based Swinging Blue Jeans have been around for 40 years in one form or another. Like many other 60's Liverpool bands (including the Searchers, Merseybeats, Gerry and the Pacemakers, and Fourmost), they've been playing the UK cabaret circuit for the past 20+ years, making a decent living recreating their old hits (including covers of "Good Golly Miss Molly," "Don't Make Me Over," and "You're No Good," as well as excellent originals such as "Promise You'll Tell Her") for the Brit baby-boomers who can't get enough of the old music. To celebrate their 40th anniversary, the band decided to record a live show in Sweden and release it via their fan club and web site. As I've heard fairly recent shows by the Searchers, who are still an incredibly tight live band, I decided to take a chance with the yet another old Liverpool band. If anything, these

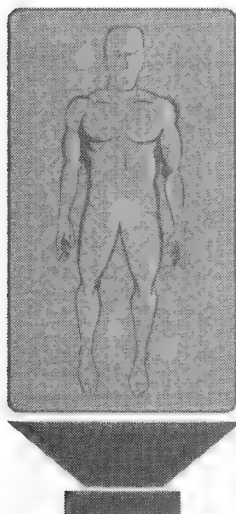
guys are better! They do fairly faithful covers of 50's classics ("Be Bop A Lula," "Think It Over," "Come On Everybody"), toss in several great 60's covers (Johnny Kidd's "I'll Never Get Over You," "Runaway," "Twist & Shout"), and a few of their hit singles ("Don't Make Me Over," and of course, "Hippy Hippy Shake"), and sound like they're playing each song as if their lives depended on it. As a recent point of reference, they sound a lot like Dave Edmunds on a good night. Original members Ray Ennis (vocals, rhythm guitar) and Les Braid (bass) have been with the band the entire 40 years, and they clearly still get a big buzz out of playing live – as it should be with rock & roll. Available through the band's web site.

*John Oliver*

## The Hospitals

### The Hospitals (In The Red)

Two piece bands are all the rage these days but it's a good bet that these deeply disturbed boys are the only duo that will have you shaking your head in bewilderment and asking yourself: "Two pieces of what?" This is due to the fact that it is virtually impossible to tell just what instruments or objects are being violently assaulted. Or when one song ends and another begins. In fact, there isn't anything even approaching riff or melody until ten minutes in – the fourth cut for those of you keeping score. As you might expect, the sound is appropriately tinny for a record wearing its D.I.Y. aesthetic so obviously on it's sleeve; an effective



AUDIO DEPRIVATION

strategy for further deranging the listener's senses as it whitens up the white noise factor of these clangorous, half-formed compositions. Unbelievable as it may sound, and that goes for the music as well, a tour is being set up for this terrible twosome. That is, if the kids' parents are willing to sign a release with the mental hospital.

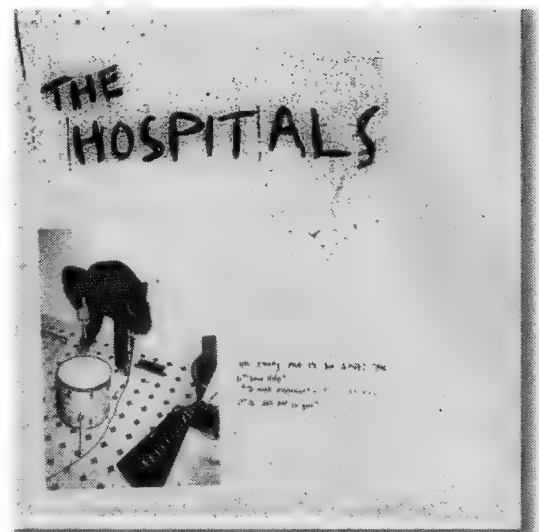
## Various Artists

**Positively 12th & K - A Tribute to Bob Dylan (DIG Music)**

## Jackie Greene

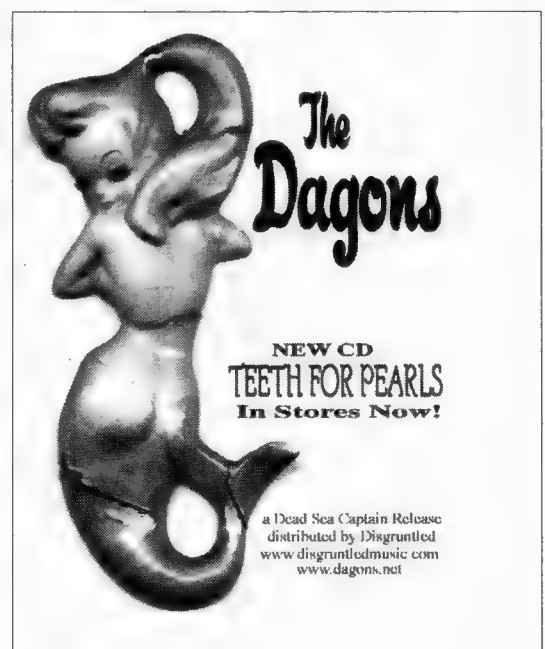
**Gone Wanderin' (DIG Music)**

While I continue to believe that about 80% of tribute albums suck, once in a blue moon, one shows up that's really worthwhile. Positively 12th & K, a recent release on DIG Music, falls into this latter category for me. This CD captures the highlights of 2 recent Dylan tribute shows at Marilyn's in Sacramento, and showcases the cream of the musical crop from that city, with two very notable participants – one old and one new. First, Sal Valentino, former singer/frontman for the Beau Brummels and Stoneground, shows up here, in his first recordings in well over a decade – and he sounds great on four Dylan tunes ("Isis," "Can You Please Crawl Out Your Window," "Everything Is Broken," and "Most Of The Time"). The new talent is one Jackie Green, a 22-year-old who sounds like a young Dylan, only with a good voice (in addition to being a better guitarist and harmonica player). This kid appears to have it all, including an incredible stage presence, I'm told. As a result of his efforts on the Dylan tribute (great electric versions of "Subterranean Homesick Blues" and "All Along The Watchtower," as well as acoustic takes of "Don't Think Twice, It's All Right" and "It's All Over Now, Baby Blue"), I went out of my way to track down his solo CD, also on DIG, released in 2002. I'm not usually into the sensitive folk-



singing types, but this kid's not only a strong, gutsy songwriter, singer, and folk-picker/harpist, he's also an excellent electric blues guitarist, if the bonus cover of Junior Wells' "Messin' with the Kid" is any indication. Jackie's so talented, it's only a matter of time before he's never discovered by the general record-buying public, and... never mind! Buy this.

*John Oliver*



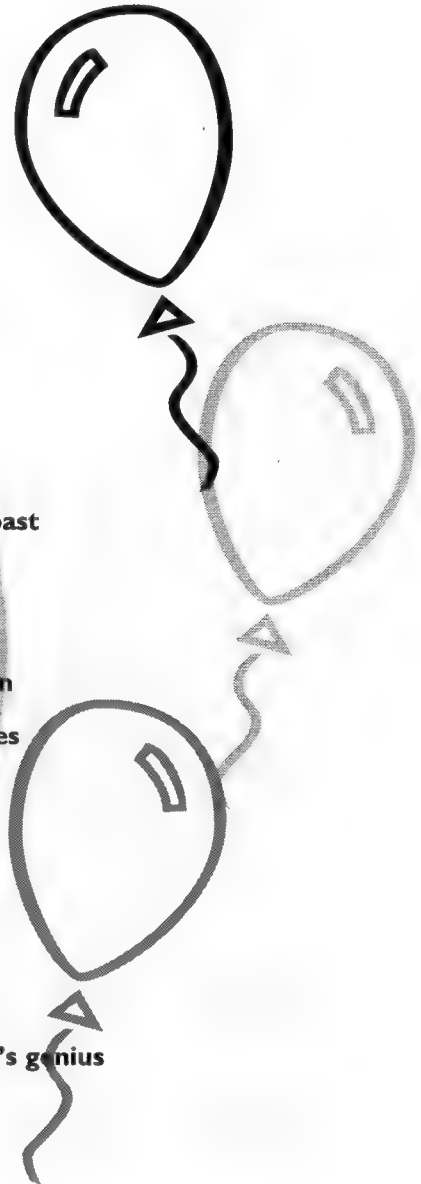


# True No. 1

Every July 2nd I walk into my backyard  
crack open an ice cold beer  
and look into the sky  
I partake in this ritual because  
on this date in 1982

Larry Walters, a 33-year-old truck driver  
from San Pedro, California  
tied 45 helium ballons to his lawn chair  
took a seat  
and launched himself 16,000 feet into the sky  
he then floated over 50 miles down the California coast  
to Long Beach where  
dazed and fearing frostbite from the high altitude  
he began shooting each of the balloons with a BB gun  
two hours later he crashed into a maze of power lines  
and spent the next three months in a hospital  
and so here I am, standing in my backyard  
enjoying an ice cold beer  
gazing up at the clouds  
and reveling in the fact that  
I may not have Einstein's brains or Sir Isaac Newton's genius  
but I will never, in all my living days,  
be as stupid as Larry Walters

*J. Riffel, Chatham, NJ*



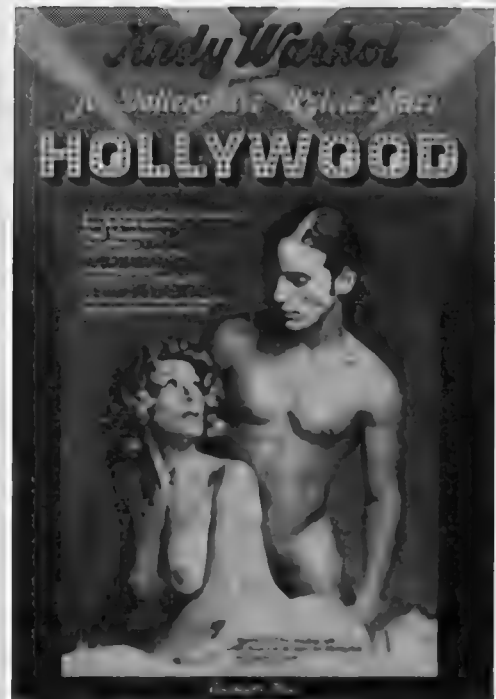
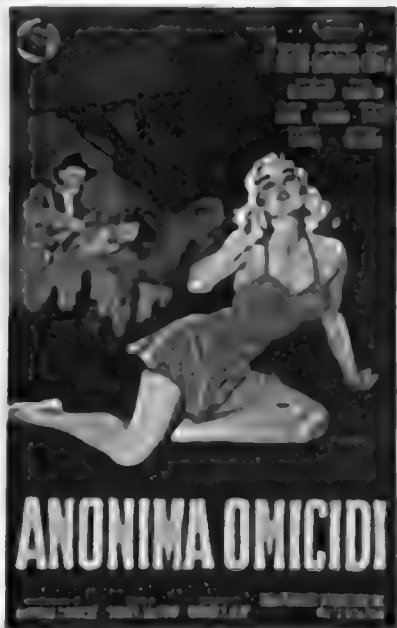
## RED HOUSE TAVERN TALES No. 7

### Three Kathy Wishes

by Christopher J. Jarmick

Kathy was the softest most comfortable woman,  
I had ever known.

When she smiled  
her eyes suddenly started to dance  
and when she looked at you  
it was as if you had downed  
six cups of coffee in quick succession.



I had suddenly turned into a lion  
basking on the sunlight  
in the African Savannah.

She was average looking at best  
Her breasts were large  
with hips to match.  
But, oh ! No one would melt  
into your arms  
like she would.

When she'd kiss deep  
it was as if you were kissing  
the way it was meant to kiss  
for the very first time.  
When you were making love  
her arms and legs would wrap around  
and all that mattered to her  
was you.  
She wanted to be connected –  
one;  
your second, better skin

Never knew why she took a liking  
to someone like me,  
and in the end I'm sure  
she wondered the same thing,

# The Red House Tavern Tales Series No. 7

but for several weeks  
I knew how good life  
was supposed to be.

Of course I took more than I gave,  
made her cry too many times,  
kept her waiting  
and kicked her out of the bed,  
twice.

You probably want to know the reasons  
and I'm sure I had a few.  
The second time I thought  
it was funny.  
just to push her right out of bed  
tell her I wanted space  
needed to sleep alone.  
She let me.

I'm glad for her sake  
that she met Frank.  
He was ready to settle down,  
be domesticated.  
Trucker turned salesman,  
they bought a tract home  
outside of Vegas  
at least 10 years ago.  
Heard they had a couple of kids.  
Though to be honest  
I can't quite picture that —  
never could.



TWO;  
She vanished without a trace.  
No one has any idea what happened to her.  
It's a permanent unsolved mystery.

THREE;  
Life wasn't worth living without me,  
so she got very drunk  
and drove her car into the Grand Canyon  
like she was Thelma and Louise.



Yep, you're right  
the bullshit meter  
is in the red  
screaming louder than  
a smoke detector.

I'm not glad at all.  
I wish one of three  
things.  
happened:

ONE;  
She'd walk back in my life  
and tell me she wanted me  
more than anyone,  
always loved me,  
and it was time for me to  
grow up.

THE BEST PART  
is that I can still imagine  
being in her arms;  
warm; loved.  
It still feels good,  
even at one quarter strength.



DEBUNKING THE MYTHS:

# The Modern Ghost

## Who are the modern day ghost hunters?

Is there any such a thing as a professional ghost hunter, namely somebody whose nine to five consists of being a detector of all things specter? After all, bounty hunters are out there picking up regular wage checks, as the recent case involving fugitive Max Factor heir Andrew Luster has shown. Duane "Dog the Bounty Hunter" Chapman spectacularly nabbed Luster in Mexico after Luster performed a vanishing act from his LA trial for a series of date rapes. Do ghost hunters make a similar living?

As someone who was growing up when *Ghostbusters* hit the cinema, I formed the naïve belief that whilst NOBODY believes in proton packs, surely nowadays professional ghost hunters were out there, hunting away

with gimlet eyes, getting ready to report back to us with the conclusive proof of ghosts (albeit minus the proton packs and slime). Assuming they exist, who are the modern day ghost hunters? How do they go about their work? What equipment are they using nowadays? Are they scientific professionals or hobbyist amateurs? Or does the truth lie somewhere in between? The first myth regarding professional ghost hunters is that they actually get paid. The modern day ghost hunter works for love, not money. The people who are actively involved in hunting for ghosts today fall broadly into two categories: well known investigators (who also write about their work), such as Loyd Auerbach, Jim Graczyk, Patti Starr and Richard Southall, and the equally devoted investiga-

# Day Hunter



Rachel Holland

tors who make up the membership to some of the 300 ghost hunting organizations out there today. But neither group makes a living from their actual ghost hunting.

Widely regarded as a leading authority on ghost hunting, parapsychologist and author Loyd Auerbach, who's also a consulting editor/writer for *Fate* magazine, warned me outright that wage earning ghost hunters simply don't exist. "There are parapsychologists, like myself, who focus primarily on field investigations or 'ghost hunt-

ing' and there are some amateurs who have made full-time status by running ghost tours or pre-paid membership organizations. But there is currently no funding for spending one's time doing such investigations and the cases pay relatively little (and often nothing at all)," Loyd explains - a viewpoint echoed by most other ghost hunters. "We are all just everyday people with regular jobs," adds Karen Travis-Eaddy, a member of the South Jersey Ghost Research Organization, based in New York and Penn-

sylvania. "Ghost hunting is something that we do because we have questions about the paranormal and have the drive to pursue a deeper understanding. We're a non-profit organization doing what we do because we love it."

But it's not only enthusiasm that drives them on; there's also a clear need for their services. Who are these clients? "Clients come from all walks of life. Anybody who believes they have a legitimate haunting could call. People who have made renovations



## modern day ghost hunters

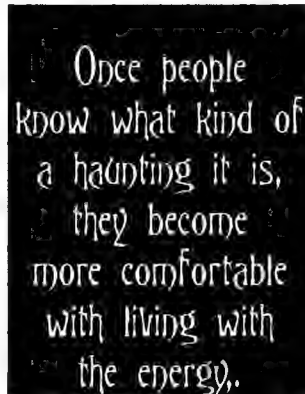
on an older house or live near a location that has significance of some sort are the most frequent type of client," explains Richard Southall, author of *How to Be a Ghost Hunter* (Llewellyn). "Hauntings are caused mostly by either a repetitious action (such as looking out of a window) or a very traumatic event (say, a Civil War battle or a murder) being ingrained into an area. Renovating an area tends to 'recharge' the impression," Southall continues. Jim Graczyk, author of *A Field Guide to Chicago Hauntings* (Whitechapel) says, "The majority of people who contact us are the general public. They may give us a lead on a business that may be haunted if they work at that location. Otherwise, it's your basic home or apartment that may have some activity going on and they call us to set up an investigation."

Todd Roll, lead investigator for the Wausau Paranormal Research Society adds that his clients include factory workers, college professors and small business owners, "anybody who believes they have experienced a ghost" he says. "Mostly our clients are just home owners who have experienced something strange in their home and want to know what is going on. With business owners it's a crap shoot. Some of them don't want the public to know they have a ghost and others are looking for us to certify that they have a 'haunted' business. Any publicity is good publicity, don't you know. But if we don't find any evidence of a haunting then that is what we'll tell the owner: "Sorry, but we cannot confirm that your business is haunted," explains Todd.

Patti Starr, President of Ghost Chasers International, has a wide variety of clients that includes businesses, hotels, restaurants, museums, historic landmarks and cemeteries, as well as private apartments and homes. "Most of the time, they just want to know if the disturbance they are experiencing really is paranormal – or whether I can find a logical explanation," she adds.

Chad Lewis, a Paranormal Investigator based in Wisconsin, also hosts the television show 'Unexplained'. He has been investigating the paranormal for nearly ten years. He describes his average client: "The majority of people I

encounter with ghost cases are just normal, rational, intelligent people who want some answers to what is happening to them. They do not want to get rich off their stories and are not seeking attention or fame. Many don't want their names released for fear of ridicule. Many of them are skeptics who never believed in the paranormal until it happened to them. Some of the witnesses still don't believe in the paranormal even after they have experienced it first hand. Often they just want some reassurance that they are not going crazy and that other people have experienced similar phenomena. Many people have an emotional investment in their belief system, which makes it extremely difficult to adapt to new experiences."



Once people  
know what kind of  
a haunting it is,  
they become  
more comfortable  
with living with  
the energy.

So how exactly do modern day ghost hunters actually help their clients? "The help is in the confirming or denying the existence of a ghost," says Brandy Stark, founder of the S.P.I.R.I.T.S. organization in Florida. "Most people just want to know if there is any validity to the experiences they are having," she adds. "One of the biggest concerns people have is whether or not the haunting can hurt them," says Richard Southall. "If it is a ghost recording, I will explain that in

most cases this type of manifestation is harmless." Karen Travis-Eaddy says the South Jersey Ghost Research group aims to help people understand what they're experiencing and to not be afraid. "We try to help people understand that this phenomena is natural and part of our existence," says Karen. Loyd Auerbach mostly gets asked to help people actually DEAL with the phenomena. "This may involve some form of resolution; removing or stopping the phenomena," he says. "However, we always make it clear that no one can guarantee the removal of such things."

"Once people know what kind of a haunting it is, they become more comfortable with living with the energy," says Patti Starr. "If, however, they are not comfortable, then we do a cleansing and prayer to help send the ghost away from the earth's plane." Todd Roll tries to explain to clients that there is no way to "get rid of" a ghost. "We tell them the best thing they can do is learn to live with it. If this fails, we'll direct the client to local clergy who will

be willing to bless the home," he says.

The S.P.I.R.I.T.S organization, which does not perform exorcism, uses more hands on methods of removing unwanted visitors. "We try to empower the clients into setting house rules. Basically, we recommend they talk out loud to the entity and ask it outright to leave. We also burn sage and 'smudge' the area," Brandy Stark explains.

Patti Starr uses a combination of psychics and credible scientists on her investigations. Ron Kolek, founder of the New England Ghost Project, uses a Franciscan Monk in his investigations. "Religious exorcism and psychic cleansing are also options available to our clients," he says.

So what exactly does the actual 'hunting' involve? "A lot of sitting around watching a TV monitor of an empty room or hallway," says Todd Roll. "You spend countless hours reviewing the tapes you recorded or the pictures you took," Jim Graczyk adds. Chris Peterson, co-founder of the Utah Ghost Hunters Society describes ghost hunting as "long hours spent after dark in places most people wouldn't be caught dead in."

Richard Southall explains the process of ghost hunting. "It's really like working a puzzle where a few pieces are missing. Over time, with perseverance, the pieces tend to fall into place. Firstly, you interview the people who report the haunting in order to find consistencies and patterns. You have to determine if the person is performing a hoax or misinterpreting

a natural phenomenon," Southall says. Loyd Auerbach adds that these interviews become an ongoing process throughout the investigation. "It is the experiences of the witnesses that drive our investigations and determine our goals," he says. The next step is the research. Southall usually starts in a local courthouse or library that may have documentation related to the haunting (newspaper clippings, official documents etc). "Specifically, I look for obituaries, previous owners of the place, what may have been standing on the site before the current building, any news stories of foul play etc. After you've got the background info, it's time for the on-site investigation." This is where the equipment comes in.

Ghost hunting equipment generally falls into three categories, says Southall. Firstly, we use equipment to capture images such as 35mm cameras and video cameras. Secondly, we use various recording devices to capture sound. And lastly, we use equipment to capture changes in temperature and electromagnetic energy such as Geiger counters and infrared thermal probes.

Technology plays an ambiguous role in ghost hunting. The Tri-Field Natural Electro Magnetic detector, originally designed to detect environmental pol-

lution, is proving useful at detecting unusual magnetic fluctuations. "Such equipment does not detect ghosts per se, but it is useful in looking for physical correlations," says Auerbach. "However, even with a Tri-Field Natural EM Meter, one cannot determine from a reading the source of the anomaly, one can only rule things out," he adds.

Patti Starr uses the Trifield to detect radio waves, static electricity and basically filter out man-made currents (interference from computers, fans, and air conditioning and electricity sources). "I also use five different cameras at a time," she says. "I use a digital Nikon 950 3.2 Pixel, a 3-D camera with double lenses, a Cannon 35 mm, a Bell Howell 35 mm, and a Polaroid instant shot. I get pretty excited when I get the same anomaly show up in the different cameras,"

adds Patti, who also penned Ghost Hunting in Kentucky (McClanahan).

Polaroid and digital cameras are favored for their instant results ending the anxious wait to develop film as the images can be examined on the spot. "Most of the equipment can be found lying around a person's house. If a person

decided to start from scratch, they could get a basic kit together for as little as \$100," says Richard Southall. "In fact, one of the most impressive ghost photos I've ever seen was taken by a disposable camera."

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Chris Peterson agrees, "There are a lot of people right now trying to sell all kinds of ghost hunting equipment. The truth is 99% of it is a waste of money. Most people spend a great deal of time and money on equipment they don't even know how to use. Here's over twenty years of experience talking. Get a camera and a tape recorder and call it good. Don't waste your money on sensors and gadgets. Infrared equipment? People tell me all the time "Well, even if infrared doesn't find a ghost, it will still let you see in the dark." I tell them, "Sure, you drop a thousand bucks in infrared to see in the dark and I'll use a flashlight for a buck ninety-nine."

Technology has its downside, as well. Photographic software, such as Adobe Photoshop, has made hoaxes easier to perpetrate. Digital cameras have a knack for picking up orbs of light. Whilst some believe they are the manifestation of spirits, others put it down to serious lens refraction. "There are a lot of people out there skulking around in dark places taking pictures of little dots of light and calling themselves 'ghost hunters'," says Ron Kolek.

"Reliance on cameras and recorders to capture paranormal phenomena is a relatively new thing," says Loyd Auerbach. "More related to the growth of the amateur groups than to what parapsychological field researchers have been doing. This is because of the enormous potential for false hits on tape, film and digital media, without the ability to rule out any of the causes of such false anomalies."

Chad Lewis elaborates: "I use a lot of equipment during a ghost investigation (4 track audio recorders, digital and High 8 video recorders, motion detectors etc). However, it is still speculative to say whether ANY of these devices actually help pick up ghosts. Coming from a science based research background, I am extremely skeptical of unsubstantiated claims. Basically, I just use it to try to rule out any conventional explanations for the phenomena."

Constantly having to deflect references to Ghostbusters, the real life ghost hunters have mixed feelings towards

Hollywood's sensational approach to the paranormal. When movies like *The Amityville Horror* and *Poltergeist* were becoming blockbusters in the late 70s and early 80s, it provoked dramatic media interest in hitherto unknown investigators. Auerbach remembers fending off journalists that begged him to show them haunted houses. "The first thing I'd ask is 'Do you know how badly funded parapsychology is? Do you know how little respect we get from the other sciences? If I could take you to a house where stuff is flying around all the time, do you think that would be happening?'" But press interest has evolved since then, now the journalists are asking questions such as mine, "So what do you guys really do?"

Not all ghost hunters are as media friendly as Auerbach, who has gone on to become Director of the Office of Paranormal Investigations, former President of the California Society for Psychical Study, regularly appearing on TV and radio. Many ghost hunters are understandably wary of media probing and fear coming across as cranks or worse, money-making scammers. They are often at pains to point out that they investigate hauntings out of their own pockets. "Sometimes we have to travel far and pay the gas and hotel costs ourselves," says Jim Graczyk. Although Auerbach doesn't make his living directly from ghost hunting, he will occasionally charge a nominal fee for investigations, usually no more than \$150. "This is partly because of the educational aspects of what we do," he says. "We provide what is almost a mini-course in parapsychology for clients."

Interestingly, the people most willing and eager to pay something are those with the least money. Rich folks bristle at having to pay anything to 'researchers' or 'scientists', even though they have no problem shelling out to psychics," Auerbach adds. Chris Peterson believes that ghost hunters who ask for money should be avoided. "The problem is this," he explains, "If they don't turn up evidence of a ghost, they don't get paid. They're liable to accept anything as 'proof' and will try to convince you of it, too. Those of us who don't get paid to find a ghost have no problem telling anyone 'I've looked, I just don't find anything.'"

A black rectangular box containing white text that reads: "There are a lot of people out there skulking around in dark places taking pictures of little dots of light and calling themselves 'ghost hunters'".

Loyd Auerbach: "This is something I disagree with to a point. Ghost hunters who ask for LOTS of money, usually justified by touting how much expensive equipment they bring to the case, should definitely be avoided. However, sometimes NOT charging invalidates one's professional standing and even causes the people you're trying to help to ignore your findings and advice. If the value of an investigator and the investigation were dependent on finding evidence, then many of us wouldn't even try to help people. The truth is that in many cases, it may turn out that the clients were mistaken (though still afraid), or that fraud was involved (one family member fooling the others). How much help we provide for people – and how effective we are as investigators of the paranormal – is absolutely independent of whether one turns up evidence of a ghost," Auerbach insists.

Regardless of the issue of charging for their services, ghost hunters are living proof of the rule 'don't give up the day job'. In his other life, Todd Roll works as a reference librarian at a college in Wisconsin. Jim Graczyk earns his daily bread as a bodyguard, whilst studying for a Masters degree in Education. Loyd Auerbach also performs as Professor Paranormal, dazzling his audiences with a variety of psychic entertainment and mind-reading effects. Chris Peterson works in the transportation industry – his fellow ghost hunters consist of blue collar workers, doctors, lawyers and police officers; Patti Starr teaches ghost hunting courses at a Commu-

nity College in Kentucky. Richard Southall works as a consultant for a vocational rehabilitation company; Brandy Stark is also a successful artist and college lecturer; Chad Lewis works as a grant writer/planner for a non-profit organization. How did their interest in ghosts develop? "Ghost hunting actually chose me," says Richard Southall. "When I was a teenager, we would periodically hear the sound of heavy boots coming down the stairs. There were cold spots that would appear out of nowhere. On one occasion, an actual apparition was seen," Southall explains. "So, I did some investigating and found out that this was a recording of a soldier who had passed through the area." Brandy Stark also had a first hand experience of a ghost: "When I was in my early twenties, I was awakened by a wonderful aroma of flowers and an intense feeling of peace. Four hours later, I was told that my grandmother had died. She was letting me know it was OK, she was OK."

Brandy went on to study for a Religious Studies Masters Degree, writing about the evolving role of ghosts throughout ancient history for her MA thesis. "Ghosts can be found in the earliest epics (Gilgamesh), the Central High Middle Ages, and right through to the modern era. They're found in every culture," she says. "Ghosts play an important role in religion, offering proof of life after death

and the existence of a soul." Brandy's current home is also 'mildly haunted'.

Regardless of the issue of charging for their services, ghost hunters are living proof of the rule 'don't give up the day job.'

She describes the experience, "I kept feeling a sensation of being watched and disapproved of. It was a sensation of annoyance and included episodes where my dogs started to bark at nothing. The culmination of it was when I actu-

ally saw a single mist in my living room. It hovered in the middle of the room, but wasn't affected by the fan that was on. That morning, my dogs had been whining, something they never usually do. I hadn't been cooking, the windows weren't open and yet there was this spiral of thick, pure white smoke or mist in the room. I remember being cross because I had no witnesses and there was no equipment in the room with me. I went around checking nothing was on fire and when I came back it had gone."

Did she unravel the mystery? "Whenever I'd been working on my computer in the evenings, I'd get this image in my mind of an angry old woman. Usually around 10:30 PM. The image was quite specific: long, thin fingers; very pale hair; hunched back. I asked around the neighborhood and was told about the former owner of my house, who had lived here in the '70s. She was thin, pale and had a hump caused by osteoporosis. Apparently, she went to bed very early. The neighbors would hear

her yelling at her housemate who liked to stay up late. The yelling started at – you guessed it, around 10:30 PM.” What did Brandy do about it? “Simple. I put the computer in a different room and the phenomena stopped completely. Some S.P.I.R.I.T. group members who are sensitive tell me she is still here but is placated and pretty mild. I still get the occasional feeling of being watched, especially when I have a friend in,” she says.

Chad Lewis’s curiosity for the unknown developed out of his studies in psychology, bringing a Masters Degree in Applied Psychology to the table. “I first started researching the paranormal to investigate the duality of belief in the paranormal. If these things are real and happening, then we must try to answer the salient questions that Humankind has always asked itself – are we alone? What happens after death? If these things are NOT real, then we must investigate what it is about human belief systems and perception that causes people to believe whatever they felt they experienced.”

How do the ghost hunters feel about the view that they are dabbling with the unknown and the various religious attitudes that condemn such interest? Richard Southall, whilst respectful towards other peoples’ religious views, has this to say: “Since I believe that most hauntings are simply recordings, I highly recommend that an investigator should try to help that spirit move on or become ‘unstuck’. Spirits are usually encountered when one of four events have taken place: the person died so suddenly that they do not realize that they are dead; they have ‘unfinished business’ or an unkept promise, they want to

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protect or keep an eye on a loved one; or they are actually kept back by loved ones who are grieving.” He continues: “As for dabbling with the unknown, one practice I do not condone is the use of a Ouija board. I believe that they are simply asking for trouble. I consider Ouija boards to be a beacon for entities to come forward.”

“I believe that all the talk about evil spirits is a load of bunk,” says Todd Roll. “The paranormal is just that part of nature which we don’t yet understand. It’s not filled with demons and evil spirits, but rather with measurable natural phenomena. There is enough evil in the flesh and blood world already. We don’t need to go conjuring up anymore,” he adds.

For further info about the fascinating antics of our ghost hunting friends, check out their websites:

**South Jersey Ghost Research:**  
[www.sjgr.org](http://www.sjgr.org)

**Wausau Paranormal Research Society:** [www.pat-wausau.org](http://www.pat-wausau.org)

**Loyd Auerbach:**  
[www.mindreader.com](http://www.mindreader.com)

**Patti Starr:** [www.ghosthunter.com](http://www.ghosthunter.com)

**Chris Peterson (The Utah Ghost Hunters Society):**

[www.ghostwave.com](http://www.ghostwave.com)

**Brandy Stark (S.P.I.R.I.T.S):** [www.centralflghosts.home-stead.com/home.html](http://www.centralflghosts.home-stead.com/home.html)

Or read up on the subject with

“How to be a Ghost Hunter” by Richard Southall  
([www.llewellyn.com](http://www.llewellyn.com))

“A Field Guide to Chicago Hauntings” by Jim Graczyk  
([www.ghostguides.com](http://www.ghostguides.com)) and “Ghost Hunting: How to Investigate the Paranormal” by Loyd Auerbach  
(available at Amazon)

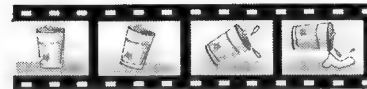


# cinema



## Heat of Madness

(d) Harry Wuet (1966)



Johnathan Wheelright isn't feeling too good; hasn't felt good for quite some time. Ever since his mother died. That was, oh, eight years ago when John had just come back from studying art with her in Paris. No, wait, eight years ago was when John's father took him to the brothel to finally get it over with. John vomited after seeing all the nude women with the come-hither looks in their eyes. That's also when the blinding headaches began.

Now, John's a badly aging thirty-something with the worst comb-over you'll ever see outside of Bill Murray's in Kingpin. John's not doing so well in the career department, either. He lives in a two room walk-up on the bad side of town taking nudie pictures for gas station calendars and stroke magazines. Treats the models badly, too. They come onto him and he yells at them.

Into John's life walks Susan, a horse-faced blonde. Rich kid. Heiress, in fact but she's keeping it a secret from John. She wants to be loved for who she is. A horse-faced, moody blonde. That's OK with John, as he's moody too. Doesn't really like to kiss or be touched. Except when he thinks of violence and murder and rape. This freaks Susan out but she believes her love will tame John. So she spends the rest of the movie trying to teach John to kiss and caress properly and find him a decent job.

Heat of Madness manages to be incredibly boring and yet impossible to turn away from. Perhaps it's because we know people like this. We call them mom and dad. Whatever. Between the yawns, you'll watch, because the film, devoid of music, lacking anything even approaching style, is like looking through a keyhole into Hell. At people pantomiming emotion, desperately attempting to convince themselves they are human.

## The Isle

(d) Ki-Duk Kim (2000)



Controversial, highly symbolic Korean art-film which tells us two things we already know: (1) Man, in the generic sense, is truly alone and; (2) Love hurts. Oh, how it hurts. Especially, in *The Isle*, which finds a man and a woman stabbing, beating, slapping and using fish-hooks on each other. Yes, fish-hooks.

It all starts when Hyun-Shik, a cop on the run for killing his mistress, shows up at this surreal fishing resort. The resort is set in a lake in the middle of nowhere and to get any fishing in you have to be motor boated to these tiny huts floating on rafts a few hundred yards from the shore. Hyun-Shik is taken to the "yellow" float by Hee-Jin, a beautiful mute woman who runs the place from her house on the dock. Hee-Jin takes orders for supplies from those staying on the raft/floats including procuring prostitutes for the hornier fishermen. When the professional women aren't available, Hee-Jin fills in for them.

For some unearthly reason, Hee-Jin falls for Hyun-Shik and when the latter attempts to kill himself in a fit of despair one night, Hee-Jin

swims under the raft and stabs Hyun-Shik in the leg just as he is about to pull the trigger. The next day, Hee-Jin putters out to Hyun-Shik and attempts to seduce him but he responds too roughly and, after extricating herself, she pushes Hyun-Shik into the drink and leaves.

In an attempt to insult Hyun-Shik, Hee-Jin brings one of her "friends" around the next day but Hyun-Shik rejects the offering and takes tea instead. With this, Hee-Jin concludes that her wayward policeman really wants her and after a bit more mild violence they become lovers. Hyun-Shik, disgusted by his transparent needs, his self-loathing now too much for him to bear, swallows a fishing line adorned with hooks in another attempt to kill himself.

It just gets weirder from here. And, while it's difficult to see, amidst all the graphic violence and misogyny, just what the filmmakers are about, there's little doubt that a powerful intellect is at work here. One with a strong aesthetic sensibility as well: Long, loving takes of the tiny house-floats surrounded in mist; colored light plying the sensual dark; the lovers reduced to insignificance while drifting in a verdant field of water grass. This painterly quality also aids in imparting an otherworldly feel to a narrative possessing a meandering almost dreamy pace.

## Invasion of The Bee Girls aka Graveyard Tramps

(d) Denis Sanders (1973)



We've been asking ourselves for years why this satiric send-up of '70s male fantasies

doesn't have more of a cult following and after seeing it for the umpteenth time, Oz finally gets it. It's about the idiocy of the male gaze. Forget the story – brilliant and beautiful female scientists turning other beautiful females into male killers – and just revel in a script which asks us to root for the destruction of horny guys. Wait, check that, by the end of this Nicholas Meyer (*Star Trek II*, *The 7% Solution*) filmed script; it's all out war on everyone with a penis.

William Smith, star of numerous biker films, plays a GI seeking to uncover the reason for government researchers dying of exhaustion. He hits on the answer early but ignores it because he's too busy trying to seduce a hot female scientist. In fact, Smith and just about every man in the tiny California town and in the town's government research facility, knows what's going on but refuses to admit it. To do so, would involve giving up their fantasy of bedding women otherwise unapproachable. Even though the men know these women are sterile mutant queen bees with no real interest in them other than as idiot prey. Amazing. The men are easy pickings. The women know that the men know that. And the men know that and they know the women know that. So what are we talking about here? Right, social satire disguised as a horror movie. Now ask if it's witty. No, it's not. Still, there's plenty of nudity, contempt for the audience, and dialogue so self-consciously inane it actually endears oneself to the viewer after a reel or two.

Oh, yes, you would like to learn how the bee transformation works, wouldn't you? Well, a gal is placed in a geodesic chamber, stripped naked, covered in gelatinous goo and then bombarded with radiation. When the radiation hardens the goo, our subject has the baked substance peeled off, gets hustled into a mini-dress and before she's allowed to leave, fitted with alarmingly round sunglasses to cover up her now black irises. And while this all taking place, the other bee girls moan and touch themselves in all manner of naughty ways.

There's no ostensible change in our "bee girl" save for the fact that she now hates men. That, and the newfound desire to make love to and then kill every guy whose path she crosses. And remember, this was before Andrea

Dworkin and Catherine MacKinnon. So, this is pretty radical stuff. Unfortunately, the concept, unlike pollen, is not allowed to get airborne, as the patriarchal filmmakers let the square-jawed, ham-fisted Smith infiltrate the hive and snuff out our wannabe bees. A pity, as it would have been interesting to see what a society made up only of lesbians and gay men looked like.

## Full-Time Killer

(d) Johnny To & Wai Ka-Fai (2001)



A delightful gallimaufry of 90s Hong Kong styles, *Fulltime Killer* throws cartographic realism to the wind and asks us to follow two contract killers all across Asia as they attempt to complete assignments while tracking each other. The killers are a contrast in styles. O is a taciturn, pony-tailed recluse, the number one target man in the Orient. Tok, a brazen psychopathic extrovert, is the man who would be king. As a former Olympic marksman and man who fears nothing and no one, he believes he should be the guy wealthy criminals should call when taking out a contract. Tired of playing second fiddle to O, Tok moves into Hong Kong, with is O's territory, and brazenly begins an affair with O's lovely housecleaner.

For some reason, O is slow to sense Tok's presence, which is surprising. Tok is doing everything to get himself noticed. When parading around in public in a Bill Clinton head isn't enough to garner attention, Tok takes out his targets in the middle of rush hour, stopping to bow to the frightened citizens as he calmly walks away. O and everyone in southeast Asia sitting up and taking notice, and from here, the picture becomes something more than the standard cat and mouse game. In fact, viewers might find themselves asking just what the hell is going on as both O and Tok bypass numerous opportunities to eliminate each other. Give things a chance, as it doesn't take too terribly long for it to become readily apparent that the issue for the two men is not who is the deadlier, but rather, who is

the greater artist. Killing takes great skill and near-misses, apparently, even more so. Directors To and Wai make sure we understand this by asking their two leads to jump over, under, sideways and down, whilst bullets whiz, cars careen, and objects explode. It's like watching Baryshnikov trying to out pirouette Nureyev. Only neither Ruskie ever had to execute a *pas-de-deux* while shooting a gun and digging a finger through a bad guy's eye. Arresting, stunningly photographed and lit, its violence approaching poetry, Full-Time Killer, despite its heavy borrowing from Hong Kong action classics, is a highly original work.

## Spun

(d) Jonas Akerlund (2003)



Mickey Rourke, coiling and uncoiling himself like a badly aging cobra, blows everyone off the screen in this self-consciously hip and endearingly cynical drug movie which attempts nothing so much as to instill the edgy and insane kick of a three day amphetamine high. As far as this goes, the film works magically: the camera shoots in and out, moves around in aimless circles, jump cuts are piled dizzyingly o'er top jump cuts, cartoons pop up as thought balloons and abortive hallucinatory visions rudely interject themselves. There's a marvelous opening sequence in hapless dealer John Leguizmo's graffiti-scarred track house in which all the leading players – Jason Schwartzman, Brittany Murphy and Patrick Fugit among them – are introduced and director Akerlund pulls out every cinematic trick in his impressive arsenal. There isn't much more to the rest of this aside from Rourke strutting and fretting his

stuff and a marvelous comic phone sex sequence by Leguizmo near film's end. Eric Roberts as a flaming gay drug lord and Deborah Harry as a butch dyke appear to a madness which is too studied by half. Unfortunately, their roles appear to have been left on the cutting-room floor.

## Spider

(d) David Cronenberg (2003)



For the first twenty minutes or so of this unrelentingly grim film, you're going to wonder just what the hell is going on. Well, you'll know what's going on – it's Ralph Fiennes walking around a gritty industrial section of London, twitching, muttering sotto voce and shambling like an extra in a George Romero movie. "Yes, yes, yes," you'll say to yourself, "I know he's disturbed, perhaps even psychotic, that's why he's him taking up residency in a halfway house for the mentally disturbed." It's at this point, at the height of your indignation, that you begin to find that you're having trouble breathing.

You're hooked. You begin to watch in abject fascination and with both eyes partially shut as Fiennes – Mr. Cleg to you – begins to revisit his childhood in the same sordid neighborhood where his new home sits. Mr. Cleg, it appears had a troubled youth. Dad (Gabriel Byrne) was an alcoholic plumber with a penchant for cheap blondes. Mom (Miranda Richardson) was a prim but loving mother. Cleg, was a taciturn child, friendless, with an odd hobby of adorning his room with attenuated bits of string. Hence the nickname Spider. In each scene of remembrance, Cronenberg has the grown-up Cleg standing

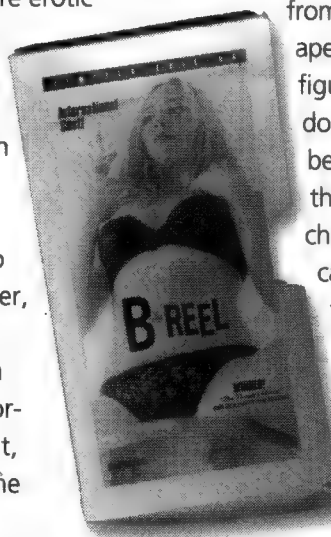
in the middle of things, watching, repeating the odd phrase and then turning to write symbolic script in slight paper notebook. It's an effective ploy, as it serves as a disquieting reminder of what our little boy is to become. And how unreliable our narrator is, especially when dad takes up with a tart at the local pub who looks very much like a disheveled version of . . . Mom. Well, after this, things go from bad to worse both in real and past time, and we're suddenly asking all sorts of questions and not at all sure what's going on or where we are. Until the very end, where the director and screenwriter Patrick McGrath, on whose novel this was based, tie it all up neatly and brilliantly. And yes, those manmade webs of Spider's have a purpose.

## B Reel

(d) Christopher Frieri (2002)  
ghostlimbfilms.com



It's less than sixteen minutes long; nevertheless, this feverish celebration of the nude female form is pure erotic dream. Visions thrown off by a mind so overwrought and belabored by longing for its subject that it is, at times, almost painful to watch. Watch you will though, getting lost in the filmmaker's curious tricks of design, his artful counterfeiting of lust in the sometimes absurd poses of his women, his willingness to lose himself in the folds and curls of the tender, irresistible flesh. The use of decadent props, form-fitting attire and atmospheric lighting in many sequences betrays a fascination with corruption, delightfully penetrating with each cut, each languorous movement of the camera, the exquisitely finished beauty of the models. Throughout Frieri shows us the art of total absorption, of tracking the sources of feminine allure to their subtlest retreats, where women become whatever it is we



need them to be, where nothing is true, and everything is permitted.

## Doctor of Doom

(d) Rene Cardona (1962):



The first of the female Mexican wrestling movies to hit our shore, courtesy of legendary schlockmeister K. Gordon Murray. You remember Murray. He was the guy that gave us all those hideous imported children's movies in the 60s like Little Red Riding Hood and Puss 'N Boots and Santa Claus. So horrid were these flicks, that the eight-year olds in attendance would boo and hurl their jujube boxes at the screen. Forget about that, though, because in the 60s, Murray also began importing these wild monster movies and badly dubbing them. It's foolish to say that Doctor of Doom is one of the best because, really, how can you choose between insane idiot classics like this or Samson and the Vampire Women? Or, The Brainiac? You can't. So, just settle in with a six-pack and prepare to laugh your behind off in this tale of an evil doctor and his attempts to perfect brain transplant operations. Which, as the movie opens, finds the Doc far from perfecting anything, as his transplant of an ape's brain into a man, has resulted in a hairy disfigured creature called Gomar. Undaunted, the doctor enlists a gang of Mexican cretins to kidnap beautiful women so that he can operate on them. None of them survive surgery and our psychotic physician decides he needs stronger physical specimens. But where to find them? A-ha! In the wrestling ring of course. Naturally, Dr. Doom being a sex maniac, narrows his focus on two of the most gorgeous grapplers in the universe: Gloria Venus and The Golden Rubi. This gives the filmmakers the opportunity to show these statuesque beauties throwing lesser mortals around the ring every five minutes. And when they're not in the squared circle, Rubi and Venus still get to strut their stuff in fending off Dr. Doom's abduction attempts. Said attempts occurring approximately



every five minutes. And let us not forget the monster, Gomar. He's let out of his cage every twenty minutes or so to wreck havoc on the police and community. The police are concerned: "As long as this monster's on the loose, it means he'll be a threat to security." Fortunately, for viewers, we don't see too much of the police. Instead, we're given a comic detective team who serve as the love interests for Venus and Rubi. Not to worry, there's no kissing. Not even any handholding. No time with all the mano-a-mano breaking out at a moment's notice. And that means that, yes, even our bumbling dicks are forced to put up their dukes every, er, every, er, well, every half hour. Times are not exact, but no matter, there's as much mindless mayhem here as in *The Wild Bunch*. It's just not as well choreographed.

## May

(d) **Lucky McKee (2002)**



Ya gotta be rooting for any guy stalwart enough to get his film into the goody-two-shoes Sundance Festival. Must take an incredible sales pitch. Then you have to worry about surviving crowds who are more interested in seeing the story of a boy and his Finnish tractor. Director McKee survived; even though his distribution company refused to push this flick after Rob Zombie's *House of 1000 Corpses* bombed. Moreover, McKee's film went on to become something of an underground sensation.

The waifish but endearing Angela Bettis stars as the titular character, an eccentric but sexy little thing working as an assistant in a veterinary clinic. She doesn't have much of a life, preferring to spend her off hours in her sparsely decorated one bedroom apartment talking to her favorite doll and sewing. Still, she longs for companionship

and when she spots Adam, a hot-looking auto mechanic (Jeremy Sisto, Billy in the HBO series *Six Feet Under*) working across the street from the vets, she decides to make a play for him. "I'm weird," she tells him after Jeremy finally notices her. "I like weird," he responds.

Weird for Adam is movies and art. For May, it's about cutting yourself and putting your hands inside cat innards. We're giving the movie short shrift here, because our discovery of May's character, as well as Adam's growing realization of May's insanity is done quite subtly. No dead cat found in the refrigerator when searching for a beer. Well, at least not until much later.

Adam's long gone by then, and May, devastated and slowly descending into complete psychosis, takes up with Polly, a lesbian co-worker for solace (Anna Faris of *Scream* fame). When May finds out her lover is not entirely serious about her, she hits rock bottom. Time to put her sewing and veterinary operational skills to good use – in making a friend.

Because the filmmakers allow us to become emotionally invested in the characters, the final bloody reel is truly unsettling. Jeremy and Polly go theirs, but we're not sure these are truly just desserts. Jeremy may be a cocksman but he's also an artist unsure of his talent and the reason women find him so attractive. Polly, is something of a slattern, but she really loves women and truly enjoys sexually satisfying them. And May, poor May, she's every child who grew up curiously loved and pushed in the wrong direction. Pushed so hard, she's lost the ability to censor herself or to gauge her affect on those around her. For most, the resulting disassociation and bewilderment, leads straight to the psychiatrist's couch. (Or to art. In *May*, it leads to a horrible, horrible breakdown and up until the very end, we're hoping against hope that it doesn't happen.

## Junk

(d) Atushi Murogu (1999)



Junk is what this is. However, this Japanese zombie flick is certainly entertaining junk. And the reasons for this are myriad. First, you have a talented director possessed of a gross worth's of wit and great visual eye. Second, said director isn't afraid to borrow shamelessly from other zombie films of the past. OK, make that outright theft. What with music samples from Return of the Living Dead, the basic storyline taken from George Romero and reprised scenes from obscure living-dead flicks. Hell, the serum used to revive the corpses is the same glowing green color as that employed in The Re-Animator.

So, why watch a film made by such a thief? As Oscar Wilde once was once heard to opine, "Great artists steal. Poor

ones imitate." Here we have an artist stealing a lot more than he's imitating and loosely translated, that means Junk is pretty damn watchable. Very watchable, as the special effects are pretty good, there's lots of blood and the thespians tread the boards with their tongues firmly in cheek. Plus, we're not given much time to think, as Murogu keeps things moving. We go from a jewel robbery perpetrated by a three-man, one-woman gang to the drop with the Yakuza at an abandoned military base. The military base happens to be the very one where experiments at reanimating corpses once took place. Some of the dead, including one very beautiful woman – why isn't she rotting? Oh yes, she looks great nude – are still perambulating about the complex. The Yakuza and their leader, a long-haired, puffy-faced dude named Ramon, plan to double-cross the gang. The zombies make hash of their plans. The rest involves gunplay, innard-eating, fist-fighting and more brains blown out than in all three Living Dead movies combined. In the end, it's a lot of sound and fury signifying nothing, but it's a hell of a ride. 🐾

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## RED HOUSE TAVERN TALES No. 8

### H-A-Double R-Y

*by Christopher J. Jarmick*

Funny thing was,  
everyone thought  
Harry was just like they were  
40 years ago.

"Harry was probably just like me,"  
Fat Ass would say. "He took his money,  
invested it, let it work for him so he never  
had to work for anyone but himself  
and he never had to work too hard at all."

Course none of us thought  
Fat-Ass and Harry had much in common at all.  
Sure, Fat-Ass inherited some money  
when he was in his 20's  
and never worked for anyone,  
but Fat-Ass never did much  
of anything at all.

Roscoe thought Harry probably  
made money making moonshine

years ago  
which is pretty much the same thing  
as selling crack and pimping,  
according to Roscoe.  
Harry then took his moonshine money  
and bought a big piece of land  
which a mining company leased  
and turned into a big rock quarry.  
Roscoe owned a big piece of  
land and was sure some day  
some developers would pay  
him a fortune for it.  
He and Harry were like  
peas in a pod.

Deke didn't believe it though  
because he used to think Harry  
had been a wild hell-raiser just  
like he was. Breaking rules,  
doing pretty much whatever he  
felt like doing,  
whenever he felt like doing it.

I never thought that,  
I figured Harry was a lot like I am.  
going with the flow,  
looking out for opportunities,  
and having as much fun  
as he could get away with.

Since I been a Red House regular  
Harry used to come in  
sometimes at noon,  
sometimes at 3 p.m.  
and always sat in the corner booth  
watching folks  
sipping his beer.

## The Red House Tavern Tales Series No. 8

Sometime s he would chase it  
with 151.

Harry owned the land  
that was turned into  
the rock quarry.

He also owned the Circle K  
but other people ran the place,  
He also once owned the Red House  
till Bonnie bought him out.

He never paid for his drinks  
and twice a year  
he bought everyone  
in the place a round  
the regulars two rounds.

On each October 29<sup>th</sup>  
the occasion was his birthday  
but on each March 16<sup>th</sup>  
we never were quite sure.  
Charlie thinks it had to do  
with Harry's wife.  
but what anniversary  
when they wed or when she left him?

Harry wouldn't tell.  
If you asked him he'd just tilt his head  
and say:

"I'm not sayin' what its for  
but I got my reasons  
you just enjoy the drink."

Harry liked his secrets  
we all do.  
He'd tell his stories

about different desert rats;  
that tumbled through town  
and did something memorable;  
like the time the Hell's Angels  
stayed for two weeks;  
or the time the Presidential Candidate  
gave a speech at the church  
that nearly everyone  
came out to see;  
or when the logs rolled off  
the truck and tore up  
the mayor's house;  
or the time the sheriff's wife  
caught him with the town's  
floozy and burned their  
house to the ground;  
or when they lost four men  
at the rock quarry  
which wound up bankrupting the company  
several years later in the late 1970's;  
but he rarely talked about  
personal things.

Harry and his wife got married  
sometime in the 50's.

They had a son,  
He was always in trouble  
until they got him enlisted  
in the Marines.

He was shipped out to 'Nam  
in '68 and back a few months later  
in a box.

The Fixin' to Die Rag by Country Joe  
is still on the juke box at Red House  
Though nobody plays it.

## The Red House Tavern Tales Series No. 8

Harry's wife was tough and mean  
and tended bar at the Red House  
back when everyone knew  
it as a roadhouse.

She let Ben run his cockfights  
for a dozen years out in the back  
and let the regulars bet, brawl,  
and do most everything.

But she wasn't afraid to use  
the nightstick or pull out the shotgun  
if someone didn't listen to her.

They say Harry called Bree the enforcer  
Joked about how well she handled herself  
and let her run Red House  
exactly as she pleased.

Charlie remembers that  
after Harry Junior died  
it all changed.

Bree drank more then ever  
and they fought all the time.

Story goes that the shotgun holes in the wall  
between the dartboards were  
put there by Bree.

If Harry hadn't ducked,  
I might never have met him.

Then in '69  
she ran over Harry's foot  
took the truck  
and never came back.

Hurt him pretty bad  
He had arthritis in it so bad  
he walked with a heavy limp.

Harry ended bar  
at Red House for nearly a year,  
then he hired Jake and Bonnie.  
to run the place.

Jake got caught  
dealing pills and smoke  
and to save his skin  
he ratted out a lot of people  
and then disappeared.

He and Bonnie got a divorce  
and everyone figures he went  
into the witness protection program.  
But maybe he didn't get protected  
and someone got to him.

That went down  
in the late 70's.

Harry took to sitting  
in his corner table  
around that time.

Bonnie didn't need much help  
and Harry was glad

he didn't have to offer any.

Eventually he let Bonnie buy him out.  
Or maybe it because the FEDS came in and  
busted the place for the cockfights  
and gambling

they forced Harry to sell.

He never told  
and it's no matter.

Harry played roadhouse historian  
and told the stories  
to anyone who listened  
for ten years straight.



## The Red House Tavern Tales Series No. 8

Then he had his first two heart attacks  
and slowed down quite a bit.

Sometimes he'd play darts  
Sometimes he'd tell some tales  
usually he just sat and watched.

The snowbirds are in town,  
come late fall, and winter  
In late spring and summer it's  
the folks who got places on the lake  
show up Fridays and Saturdays mostly.

Bonnie put in a mechanical bull  
which was popular  
for over 5 years.  
Deke got himself 86'd on weekends.  
Harry watched.

Deke and Charlie had a great time  
taking turns with an axe and blow torch.  
when Bonnie junked the bull.

It was still making money,  
but the insurance agent got nervous  
about liability.

Charlie turned the monstrosity  
into one of his junkyard sculptures  
and some idiot snowbird bought it  
for a grand or so.

We went to Vegas and blew the money.  
I turned 150 bucks into 300 at black jack  
and bought a few rounds when we got back.

While we were gone,  
Harry had another heart attack  
It was the stroke that almost shut him down.  
He nursed his forbidden light beer slowly.

It was mid-April,  
Harry had not been in Red House  
for three days straight  
and that made people curious;  
just wasn't like him.

They found Harry dead in his bed  
He had passed in his sleep.  
Harry's wife didn't show up  
(And I was happy to win \$50  
From Fat-Ass on that one.)  
Instead it was his younger brother.  
No one had met him before  
and he wasn't very social.  
He had a couple lawyers  
and they handled things  
I'm not sure who got what.

All I know is that the corner booth  
was Harry's

The regulars never sat in it  
and on the wall behind it  
is the faded picture  
of Harry standing outside  
The Red House with Bonnie  
about the time she started  
tending bar for him.

He was dressed in his blue denim shirt  
and dark blue levi's  
and looked,  
well, truth be told  
he looks a lot like  
I do  
now.

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